

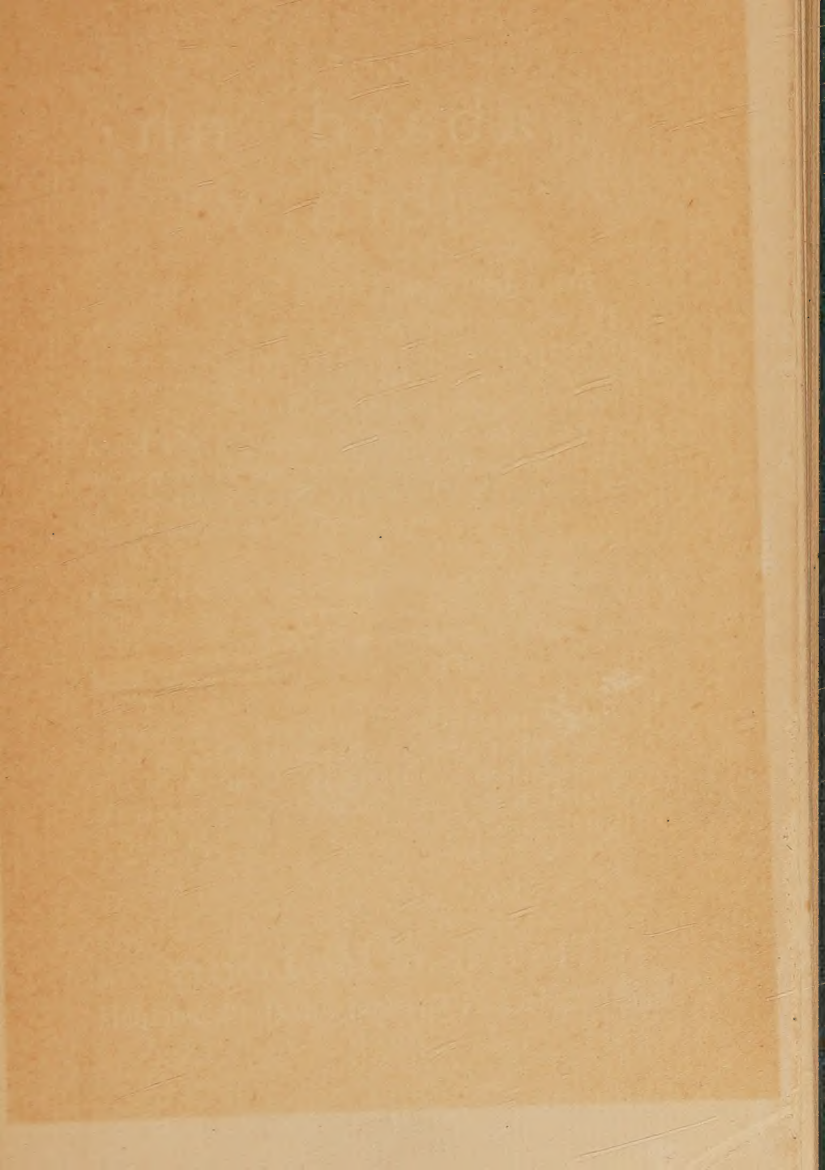
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HIS DAUGHTER FIRST

HIS DAUGHTER FIRST

BY

ARTHUR SHERBURNE HARDY

AUTHOR OF "BUT YET A WOMAN,"

"PASSE ROSE," ETC.



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HIS DAUGHTER FIRST



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HIS DAUGHTER FIRST

I

THE train was late and the station was dark. A single employee with a lantern stood on the platform. There were no lights, nothing to indicate the presence of a village or even a house.

Paul walked forward for his portmanteau, and then followed the platform to the rear of the station, where a sleigh was waiting.

“Is this Mrs. Kensett’s carriage?” he asked.

The coachman touched his hat and Paul took his seat, turning up the collar of his coat and drawing the robe close about his feet, for the night was bitterly cold.

“How far is it?” he asked.

“About a mile, sir.”

The road followed the bank of the river, invisible under its double covering of ice and snow. A long slope of dark pines shut out the eastern horizon, but on the west the plain, broken only by the straight lines of the fences with their fringe of leafless bushes, stretched as far as the eye could see,

white and silent under the winter stars. Nowhere a sign of life, nor any sound save the monotonous singsong of the sleigh-bells and the sharp crunching of the hardened snow under the hoofs of the horse.

Paul was wondering whether his cousin Dolly had changed since she had become Mrs. Cecil Kensett.

"Think of Dolly a mother and a widow!" he said to himself.

The road curved sharply into a covered bridge, climbed a long hill through a dark gorge, and then emerged upon a wide undulating plain. The sky was clear, yet one could not see far. A fine crystal mist, that winter haze which only the North knows, crisp as the frozen snow and glittering with myriad points of light, filled the silent air. A few isolated farmhouses, white and naked as the fields, were passed; then, in the distance, huddled like sheep in a storm, the houses of a village became visible.

In her letter of invitation Dolly had said Miss Frazer was still with her, — Margaret. Dolly was always writing about Margaret, with that reiterated note of admiration which finally provokes resentment. How enthusiastic Dolly always was about people for whom she cared!

As they neared the village the outlines of a low ridge detached themselves from the background of distant hills, and from one of the dark clusters

of pines which patched its surface shone a glare of lights, blurred by intervening branches and reflected by the snow.

"That must be the house," thought Paul; and then his mind reverted again to Miss Frazer, of whom he had unconsciously formed that mental picture which grows up about the name of a person we have never seen. Now that he was nearing his destination he began to wonder whether he should see her to-night. The train was two hours late, — it was already after midnight. Dolly of course would be at the door. "No, probably not," he said half aloud, thinking of Miss Frazer again.

"Sir?" said the coachman, turning on his seat.

"Is that the house?" asked Paul.

"Yes, sir, on the hill."

At the foot of the ridge there was a wide gateway, like the entrance to an Italian villa, with curved wing-walls, and high posts surmounted by large balls; then a long driveway that seemed to wander in an aimless fashion between the pines and hemlocks, until it suddenly disclosed the white gambrel-roofed house with its broad piazzas and Ionic portico. One cannot always tell what it is in men or houses which on the first approach seems to say, "Ah, it is you! I was expecting you, and I am glad," — a certain warmth of welcome, which does not, however, descend to familiarity. Paul felt this at the first glimpse of the brightly lighted windows,

even before the door opened and he heard Dolly at the head of the stairs crying, —

“Paul, Paul, is it you, is it you?”

“No,” he thought, “she has not changed; she is the same dear Dolly.” She had her arms about him before he could reply.

“Yes, it is I. The train was fearfully late, Dolly. I thought you would be in bed.”

“I, in bed! what an idea! We have been waiting for you for two hours. Come up to your room, there’s hot tea there. Oh, how glad I am you are here!” she cried, turning to look back at him as he followed her up the stairs.

Dolly was not beautiful. Her hair was too light, her face too colorless. But her blue mobile eyes and sudden smile atoned for all that was lacking in color and form. She could not keep the warmth of her heart out of that smile or its quick impulses out of those eyes.

“Margaret has gone to bed,” she said, as she opened his door. “She knew we would have such a lot of things to talk over. Are you cold?”

“No, not in the least, but this fire is just the thing!” he exclaimed, crossing the room to the blazing hearth, beside which the tea was smoking in its silver urn. “Who is Margaret?”

Dolly looked at him with one of her quick, reproachful smiles. The question seemed to give him back to her more than his actual presence.

“How like you! You know perfectly well who Margaret is. But take off your coat, Paul,” she added, unbuttoning it with her own fingers. “And you have not yet asked me how I am.”

“You don’t give me any time, Dolly. Besides, you are always well, and — happy too?” he said inquiringly, stooping to kiss her hair.

“Oh, how good it is, how good it is to see you!” she murmured, paying no attention to this last sentence.

“And Dorothy, she is well? How old is she now, Dolly?”

“Five. You shall see her to-morrow. Sit down, Paul; I just want to look at you.”

He laughed and dropped into the easy-chair drawn up before the fire, watching her as she poured the tea. Her hands trembled a little, and something very like tears was shining in her eyes. Yes, she had changed. She was a little older, of course; and there was something in her manner which made him observe her sharply, although he put it down to the excitement of his arrival. Dolly used to be as clear as day.

A servant had brought in Paul’s portmanteau and taken it into the adjoining room, through whose open door Paul could see his cousin moving about, silently inspecting the bed and toilet-table, as if to see that everything was in order, and as if she had not already done so a dozen times during the day.

"I wanted you near me, Paul. This is my own parlor," she said, coming back to sit down on the arm of his chair. And then she began to tell him about Dorothy, and to question him about his journey and plans. But there was an air of constraint in all she said.

"Margaret said we should have so much to talk over," she explained, as though aware that he was conscious of her manner; "so we have. I thought we should begin now, before the fire. I have been looking forward to it every minute of the day. And now that you are here," — she drew a long sigh, — "that is enough." She lingered a moment. There was apparently much to say which she did not say. When the moment of meeting comes one does not always plunge into all one anticipated.

"I am so happy that you are here," she said, when she bade him good-night.

Paul remained sitting before the fire a long time after she had gone. Though he had scarcely looked about him, everything in this room seemed familiar. For some reason that he could not have explained it satisfied him, — as a woman's dress satisfies the eye that is not afterwards able to describe it. Was it because it was so comfortable, because he felt the touches of a hand he had so long missed? Or simply because he himself was so glad to be there? He felt as if it were his own room, in which he had lived for a long time.

“It is like home,” he thought.

Above the fireplace hung the portrait of a young girl in a large hat with a black plume. He watched the firelight shadows flickering on the wall and passing like a caress over the face in the dark Florentine frame, — a face with something more than mere beauty in it, for mere beauty can even repel. No, beauty was not the word, but fascination, — the confiding smile about the mouth, the fearlessness in the earnest gray eyes, and the indescribable charm of modesty with which the hand held the green drapery over the breast. He wondered who it was, as rousing himself at last he began to unpack his valise and undress.

From his window he looked out upon the fields and hills, gaunt and bare, over which the newly risen moon spread a cold, even light. It was a picture without color or feeling or depth, such as a savage might have drawn in outline on the sand. Nature herself seemed to have died out of this white world, but his heart warmed and responded to it. It seemed to say to him: “You have seen other lands, the fluent shadows, the murmuring life, the mystery and lure of other nights. But you were born here, in my arms. You are my child, and I only can touch your heart.”

On the way to her room Dolly stopped at Miss Frazer’s door.

“Margaret, are you asleep?”

“No, come in. Did your cousin come? I heard the sleigh-bells.”

“Yes, the train was two hours late. I am so happy, Margaret. I just came to tell you that. I don’t expect you to like Paul,” she added, after a pause.

“It is of no consequence whether I do or not,” said Margaret, “but I shall not quarrel, Dolly dear, with any one whom you love.”

II

WHEN Paul came down to the breakfast-room the morning after his arrival the winter landscape was radiant with sunshine. It poured in through the deep window which, extending out upon the piazza, seemed to take in a part of the outside world, and to bring into the room the light and freedom of the sky. There are windows which are merely holes in a wall, which make one feel a prisoner, and shut out all they reveal.

A bowl of roses stood in the centre of the breakfast-table, and the butler who brought in the coffee said he was to call Mrs. Kensett when breakfast was served. Dolly came in almost immediately, as radiant as the world outside.

"It seems too good to be true to see you sitting here ; I shall never get used to it," she said, hovering about the table in search of unsupplied wants.

"Sit down, sit down, Dolly," remonstrated Paul ; "are n't you going to eat any breakfast yourself ?"

"Oh, I had my breakfast long ago. I really did n't sleep much last night. What I am hungry for is a talk, a long, long talk. But it's not easy to begin. Think ! it is years since we saw each

other." She was sitting opposite him, her chin on her hands and her elbows on the table. "I suppose starving people feel as I do, — they can't satisfy themselves in an orderly manner. They just want to — to cram."

"Well, there is no hurry, Dolly; and hurry always wastes. Where is Dorothy?"

"She has gone to school. There is a very excellent school here, and Margaret often goes with her. We shall have just ourselves this morning. Which would you rather do? sit here, or shall we take a walk? It's a perfect day."

"A walk by all means. I am glad you haven't forgotten how to walk. Some people always give up a lot of things when they marry, — some things that made them attractive."

"Yes, I know. But perhaps it's age, not marriage. I'll go and get my furs. You will find some cigars there in the cabinet. They were Cecil's. He used to think them good." And Dolly smiled at him as she closed the door.

It would have been thought by any observer that these two were brother and sister rather than cousins; and such they were in sympathy and affection, though not by blood. Left an orphan at an early age, Paul had been promptly received into the family of his uncle, who never shirked a duty as he never confessed a fault. In his new environment Paul had acquired a deadly aversion for many things

excellent in themselves, and in his revolt had reached the extreme which generally follows a surfeit or infelicitous compound, whether in morals or food. He never heard a church-bell now without experiencing that sense of dreariness which had characterized his childhood Sunday, and certain profane melodies which had been appropriated by the hymnal brought what used to be called the meeting-house, with its slow-passing hours, so vividly before him that he shuddered when he heard them on the stage. Morning prayers had been too often connected with bodily punishment for the derivation from either of whatever good they might have contained for him had they been less frequent, less inevitable, and less intimately associated; and the mere gurgle of water poured into a glass was enough to transport him back to the awful stillness of the communion hour, when, sitting beside his uncle in the green-upholstered pew, he used to watch the deacons make their silent round, and wonder what it was all about. What solemn deserts of the Incomprehensible his little feet had traversed!

It is not well to speak ill of the dead. But Mr. Graham was one of those past realities in the shadow of which Paul still walked. Much good might be said of him in all things wherein the opinions of other people did not conflict with his own, and it must be admitted that a rigid con-

scientiousness had often led him to the verge of heroism under circumstances in which the worldly wise would have beaten a retreat. Paul was of another nature, but cast in the same mould of self-will; and being happily not altogether held down by the chains of dependence, on reaching his majority had quickly packed his trunk and set out to make his own way.

It had not been quite so easy for Dolly to emancipate herself. She had a real and genuine affection for Mr. Kensett when that gentleman asked her to share his life, but it would have been as idle to deny that the thought of freedom had not had its weight as to assert that her husband was the master-hand to sound all the deeper chords of her nature. After her mother's death she had presided with admirable tact and sweetness over her father's house, in which she counted for everything so long as she agreed with its head and nothing when she did not. Mr. Graham was one of those fathers in whose eyes children never grow up. Dolly had had many suitors, but either she was too young to marry, in the estimation of the man who had married a girl of eighteen, or the suitors themselves were always affected with moral disorders and deficiencies which placed them outside the pale. Mr. Kensett, however, had proved a lover whom discouragement did not discourage; and although the framework of Mr. Graham's mental and moral

system grew more rigid with age, like his physical one it grew more brittle, less enduring against importunity, and finally snapped under Dolly's and Cecil's united pressure. Paul, who had in the mean time obtained a position as engineer in a South African mining company; returned for the wedding; and now again, after a career whose success he regretted his uncle was not alive to witness, had come back once more, to find all these things but memories and Dolly alone in her big house at Cedar Hill.

He had needed no invitation to make his home with her during his stay in America. His first and immediate thought had been to visit her, who, much to his surprise, and for the first time since her husband's death, was passing the winter in the country. She was by no means dependent upon society, yet Paul could not help wondering what influences had decided her to prolong her usual summer sojourn at Westford into the winter, and why her well-known hospitality had contented itself with a single guest.

He was thinking over these things when with one of Cecil's cigars he stepped out upon the piazza. With one of those sudden changes common to a New England winter, an almost spring air had succeeded the still cold of the previous day, and the sun had already begun to undo the work of the night. The trees stirred with a suggestion of re-

newed life, and their branches, relieved one by one of their icy coverings, seemed to be stretching themselves for the first time after a long sleep. "It's a glorious view," he said, as Dolly joined him on the porch, "but are you not beginning to long for a street of shops?"

"No," she said. "I love this quiet and solitude. I quite agree with Dorothy, who is allowed to play anywhere in the grounds on condition that she does not go outside the gate alone. The other day we found her in the road, and when I reminded her of her promise she said with perfect sincerity, 'I was n't alone, mamma. I was with myself.'" Paul laughed, and there was a little pause, which Dolly appeared to be utilizing in preparation for a more important communication. "But I am not so contented with *myself*, Paul," she resumed, "and have been waiting for you to talk to. You know there is no one but you, — and I am glad you have come."

"Is it anything serious, Dolly?" asked Paul, looking at her quickly.

"No, not exactly, — that is, I think not. There are several things. First, some business. You must listen patiently, and not form any judgments until you have heard me through. I am not sure whether you know Mr. Heald. No? Well, I was n't sure. He was one of Cecil's business friends, — that is, he says he was. I never met

him until last year, — at a house party in Lenox, — and we naturally spoke of Cecil. He said he used to be associated with Cecil in certain enterprises, enterprises which always turned out well; that he owed his start and much of his success to my husband, and that he regretted that he had never been able to discharge the debt. I can't put it all as he did, and what I am saying sounds very crude and abrupt, I know. But it sounded very natural at the time."

"What did?" asked Paul, as she paused for a moment.

"Well," pursued Dolly, who had nerved herself to her task and could not be diverted from her orderly narration by unexpected questions, "not then, you know, but later, and with a great deal of delicacy, he told me he had been concerned in the development of some copper properties in Arizona, and that if Cecil had been alive he should have proposed their working together. He said the mines had turned out quite beyond his expectations, that they were paying twenty per cent on the investment, that in fact he was making more money than he knew what to do with, and that if I had any funds for investment and would permit him, as a matter of sentiment and gratitude, he would be very glad to give me some of the stock at par. He gave me all the details and showed me all the papers. The par value of the stock was twenty-

five dollars, and it had been issued at ten. There had been two assessments of two dollars and a half, which made the amount paid in fifteen dollars a share. That was very plain, was n't it? The shares were selling then, as I saw in the papers, at sixty. He said they were sure to go to twice or perhaps three times that, even after the issue of some treasury stock which insiders were to have at par; and that if I consented he would like to put a part of his share of the new issue in my name" —

"You to pay for it."

"Of course," assented Dolly. "I could n't accept a gift."

"How much did you present him with?" snapped Paul, foreseeing the end of such romances.

"You promised to hear me through." Paul remembered no such promise, but shut his teeth and held his peace. "It's nothing very serious, as I told you, only — but let me tell you in my own way. I had a good deal of money in the bank, and I took a thousand shares, — twenty-five thousand dollars. I was n't thinking so much of myself, for you know Cecil left me all I can ever possibly need. I was thinking of Margaret. You know she has n't a great deal" —

"I know nothing whatever about Miss Frazer," Paul retorted shortly.

"Don't get angry, Paul, please."

"I am not getting angry, but" —

"Everything has turned out just as he said," continued Dolly. "I have had twelve hundred and fifty dollars every quarter in dividends" —

"Since when?" interrupted Paul.

"Since a year ago last September."

"But how does this concern Miss Frazer?"

"Well, in the summer I spoke to Margaret about it. She is very proud, and of course she would not accept a gift in money from me" —

"Any more than you would from Mr. Heald."

"No, certainly not," acquiesced Dolly tranquilly. "But she said she would put some of her own money into my hands if I wished her to, and that it was not necessary for her to say that she trusted me implicitly."

Paul refrained from further comparisons which a like confidence on Dolly's part suggested, contenting himself with an impatient sigh.

"So I wrote Mr. Heald I would take another thousand shares if he could spare them," — Paul groaned inwardly, — "and I had them put in Margaret's name."

"Did Mr. Heald let you have them on the same generous terms?"

"Nearly. He said the stock was selling at eighty then, but he could get me what I wanted for forty. Margaret sold some bonds she had which were paying her only about three and one half per cent, but I insisted upon guaranteeing her the twenty per

cent on the Argonaut shares, and had an agreement drawn up to that effect by her lawyer. So you see Margaret is perfectly safe."

"What did Jack Temple say to all this?" asked Paul dryly.

"He knows nothing about it," replied Dolly. "Cecil told me before he died that so far as money was concerned I need not worry, and that in all that related to it I could trust Mr. Temple as I would have trusted him. So after a time I went to see him, — naturally I had to see him frequently then, — and I said to him frankly this: 'Mr. Temple, you know I have absolutely no knowledge of business, and can only trust my affairs to you as implicitly as my husband told me to do.' What I have to propose is this: I wish you to manage all my investments, and to deposit my income, subject to your commissions, to my credit. On the other hand I shall draw all my checks through you and not directly on the bank. Then you will know exactly what I am spending, and I shall feel, whenever I cash my check, that I have a perfect right to do with it just as I please without consulting you. Of course you will send me statements from time to time of my balances, but if ever you think I am spending more money than I can afford, I wish you to return my check and tell me so frankly, as my husband would have done.' This he has never done yet."

Paul smiled at the simplicity and ingenuousness of this arrangement.

"I begin to think you know the essentials of business after all," he said, somewhat relieved.

"It seems to me business is perfectly simple if you are dealing with people whom you can trust, I mean as to their judgment as well as their honesty," replied Dolly. "And that is just it. I am not worried, because I have paid for the Argonaut shares out of my income, and I am sure Mr. Temple would have warned me had there been any need. But, as you see, of the particular uses to which I put what I draw he knows nothing. He knows I have been making some improvements at Cedar Hill, and I suppose he thinks, if he thinks about it at all, that the money has gone there. If it should be lost it would be lost, and that would be the end of it. For myself I am not concerned. But Margaret's case is different. I should be bound to return her forty thousand dollars if the worst should come. But I think, if that did come, I should not do so. It would be dreadfully hard for her to go back from twenty to three and a half per cent, and I think the best way would be to continue paying her the Argonaut income and say nothing more about it."

"Deceiving her in the mean time," said Paul.

"There are some things which are quite right to do if people do not know that you do them," replied Dolly resolutely. "And that is just what I am worried about, — that she would find out."

“Certainly she would. But we will talk about that later. Finish your story first.”

“About two weeks ago,” continued Dolly, “I noticed the shares were going down. I never took any interest in such things before, but naturally I looked in the papers once in a while to see what was happening to Argonaut shares. I thought I should sell them when they were very high, — to make a lot of money for Margaret, without giving it to her, you know. But after a while they began to go down, very slowly, first to seventy, and then to fifty. And then I wrote Mr. Heald and asked him the reason. I will show you his letter. He said I was not to be troubled in the least; that the fall in the stock was due to what he called general market conditions, and had nothing to do with the mine itself; that, on the contrary, they were enlarging the plant, and that possibly there would be another assessment of five dollars for new machinery; that under ordinary circumstances an assessment for a new mine which had passed its trial period would not affect much, if any, the price of the stock, as it meant that the outlook justified increasing the working equipment; but that just now — I am repeating exactly what he wrote” — “and you are doing it remarkably well,” thought Paul, — “there was a falling off in the foreign demand, and that speculators were taking advantage of lower prices for the metal to hammer the market, as he

called it, and to secure control. But that I must just sit still and all would come out right."

"There are always two parties to a speculation, Dolly, and one of them generally finds it difficult to sit still."

"I don't call it a speculation, Paul. Mr. Heald said it was an investment."

"Well, call it an investment. What did you reply?"

"Nothing. What could I?" Mrs. Kensett ejaculated, with an explanatory wave of her sable muff. "I understand everything he tells me, — nothing more. But, as I told you, about two weeks ago the stock fell suddenly, to forty, and I am beginning to be frightened — on Margaret's account."

They walked on in silence, Dolly stealing an occasional rapid and inquiring glance at Paul's face. He flung away his cigar at length and stopped short, facing her.

"You have asked my advice. Are you prepared to take it?"

"Certainly, Paul dear. That is precisely what I wish to do."

"Well then," he said, "I shall go directly to Jack, tell him the whole story, and see what can be done."

"I was prepared for that, for I thought that was what you would probably decide," Dolly said simply, taking Paul's arm in her affectionate way, and

inwardly thanking him for not having told her she should have done so long ago herself. "I should have seen him had you not been coming home, only it would have hurt my pride, and it was ever so much easier to speak to you. You know I never could speak to father without" — "without a row," thought Paul, as Dolly left her sentence in the air — "and I never want to feel that I cannot come to you with everything — everything," she repeated a little tremulously.

Paul stooped and kissed her, in the broad sunshine, and took the hand in the sable muff in his own.

"That's right, Dolly dear. You are not in very deep, and we'll see what can be done. It may be all right, but I've heard such stuff as this Heald has been giving you before. As lambs go you have been remarkably prudent, and now that you have confessed you will feel better."

The hand in the muff grasped his more tightly.

"I am not quite through yet, Paul."

He stopped short again, and looked at her gravely.

"Oh, it's not about money," she added quickly, coloring a little and avoiding his gaze. And then, with evident relief for the respite, and running ahead to meet two figures which had just turned a bend in the road, "Why! there's Dorothy and Margaret."

III

A NEW ENGLAND country road in winter permits only two to walk abreast. "Come with mamma, Dorothy dear," said Dolly, after the first words of greeting and presentation were over. But Dorothy, with a child's not unusual preference for male society, clung shyly to her new acquisition, and Paul found himself following the tall, slender figure of Miss Frazer with a small mittened hand in his.

As often happens before taking a single step toward any real knowledge of a new acquaintance, he was instantly conscious of liking Miss Frazer. She had given him her hand cordially, and greeted him with a frank smile from her gray, fearless eyes, but her whole manner was instinct with a quiet dignity, — the reserve which attracts rather than repels. But his thoughts were still occupied with Dolly's affairs, and had he never seen Miss Frazer again he would probably have said that she made no particular impression upon him.

A branch road sloped steeply down to the plain below where, veiled in the bluish smoke from its chimneys and the mist of the morning sun, lay

Westford ; and from the deep valley beyond, where the river ran hidden from view, came the shrill whistle of an engine.

“Dolly,” said Paul suddenly, “I have some rather important matters to talk over with Temple. What should you say to my inviting him up for the night?” Dolly turned and looked at him hesitatingly. “There’s a train that leaves New York at three o’clock which would bring him here for dinner. That will give him time enough, if the telegram finds him and he can come.”

“Why certainly,” Dolly replied, recovering herself. “We will hurry back and send to the office at once.”

“No, if you don’t mind I will go myself now. It will save time, and there’s none to lose. I would ask you to go with me,” he said, glancing from Dolly to Miss Frazer, “but these little legs of Dorothy’s hardly more than mark time.”

“Margaret, you go with Paul,” Dolly suggested. “Dorothy can come with me.”

“I should like the walk very much,” said Miss Frazer, “if Mr. Graham does not intend to run all the way.”

“We can come back as slowly as you please,” he laughed, taking out his watch ; “but we shall have to hurry, — and we’ll see what there is for little girls down there,” he said, waving his hand to Dorothy.

They set off side by side, in the narrow lanes traced by the runners of sleighs and horses' feet, at a brisk walk quite different from Dolly's rather indolent pace. The road dipped sharply into a hollow where a small brook, fringed with willows, bubbled under the ice; rose again to the plain, and, after passing a few straggling houses whose slovenly appearance and untidy yards proclaimed their occupants to be residents of what Westford called the "back street," opened upon a long wide avenue of magnificent elms, bordered by comfortable looking and in some instances strikingly large and well-proportioned houses, from which, however, life seemed to have ebbed away in some distant past like a receding tide, leaving them to all appearances empty and silent amid their lilacs and pines. The wide grass-grown spaces bordering the road between the double lines of elms were forsaken in winter, although a snow-plough had evidently made an attempt to find the paths. Pedestrians, sleighs, and sledges shared alike the main road, which stretched like a narrow ribbon of dirty yellow down the broad expanse of white. At its extremity rose the square white tower of the church, looking down with its air of proprietor and guardian upon the common, — around which were gathered whatever signs of life Westford possessed, — its pointed spire above the square belfry overshadowing in silent disdain the small Gothic chapel

which summer visitors had erected for their own use.

Paul and Margaret took the diagonal path traversing this open space toward the corner where the brick hotel, enlarged for the summer population with scant recognition of what the summer visitor demands, marked the centre of the village. Here were the few shops which ministered to the needs of the surrounding country, and the post office with the town hall above, before which were drawn up a few empty sleighs and wood-laden sledges.

Having sent his telegram, Paul looked about for the most promising of the shop windows.

"Do you suppose we can find anything for Dorothy here?" he asked.

"It will be over there if anywhere," said Margaret, indicating what appeared to be a Doric temple on the opposite side of the street.

"I probably made a rash promise, but you must help me out. It will never do to go back empty-handed. Dorothy's imagination has doubtless been at work ever since we left her, though she must have everything money can buy already. Shall we try?"

They crossed the street, stopping for a moment under the dingy portico of pillars before the windows; but they did not prove very alluring.

"What a collection!" exclaimed Paul, as his eye searched the motley array of hardware, gro-

ceries, dry goods, and crockery. "I am afraid it is hopeless."

"I happen to know exactly what Dorothy wants," suggested Margaret. "Just a common wooden three-legged stool. It's perfectly absurd, I know," she added, "but she has been crazy over a milking-stool she found in the barn. She wants it in the nursery, and I am sure she will think more of it than of the finest Nuremberg toy."

"I never should have selected that, certainly, but I shall take your advice, and put all the blame on you if it proves bad."

"I am willing to risk it," said Margaret, and a moment later he emerged, carrying his ridiculous purchase by one of its three clumsy legs.

Now and then as they retraced their way, a passer-by greeted Margaret with an awkward nod of recognition, as if half ashamed of his politeness, salutations which she acknowledged by a quick "good-morning," with the result of still further increasing the embarrassment of those to whom it was addressed.

"What a strange people they are," she said. "A word of courtesy is such an effort, but an act of chivalry would be a mere matter of course."

"It is shyness, isn't it?" said Paul, "and a rugged sort of independence. They greet one another in precisely the same manner, out of a corner of the eye."

A jingle of bells caused them to step aside to allow the passage of an empty wood-team approaching from behind.

"It's Mr. Pearson," said Margaret. "He always gives me a ride." And, in fact, the horses slackened their pace as they came up, and a rough voice exclaimed, —

"Be yer goin' my way? I'll give yer a lift as fur as the gate."

The speaker was a thin, wiry little man, with weather-tanned face and tangled reddish beard, clad in a beaver cap pulled down over the ears, a long, faded blue army overcoat, and water-soaked boots.

"Shall we?" asked Margaret, looking at Paul.

"Oh, there's room enough for two," said Mr. Pearson cheerily. "It ain't so clean as it might be, but chips and bark don't hurt nobody."

Paul helped Miss Frazer into the low box, open behind and boarded at the sides, above which projected stout poles festooned with chains. A bright color of health and amusement shone on her cheeks, and she laughed at Paul as she swayed to the motion of the runners on the uneven road. A haunting recollection of something seen before had come to him with every look into her face. Now he remembered. It was the child's face in the Florentine frame in Dolly's parlor.

"That's a mighty handy stool o' your'n," re-

marked Mr. Pearson, inspecting Paul's purchase critically. "Cows givin' much milk up your way?"

"I am afraid I can't give you much information about Westford cows," laughed Paul. "I am a stranger here."

"Oh, be ye," said Mr. Pearson, who knew it all the time, but whose curiosity generally approached its quarry indirectly. "Come from fur?"

"From South Africa," said Paul.

"Yer don't say!" exclaimed Mr. Pearson, regarding him with evidently increased interest. "They're a mighty long time a-gittin' through their fightin' down there."

"So were we," Paul replied, glancing at the army coat.

"That's so, so we were," Mr. Pearson assented. "I had a hand in it myself and oughter know. I've been a-drawin' o' my pension this very day."

"How much do you get?" inquired Paul.

"Forty-five dollars the fust of every quarter."

"That's pretty good pay for thirty years of peace," Paul said.

"Waal, 'tain't enough to need a guardeen," remarked Mr. Pearson, whipping up his horses.

Paul saw that he was trenching on delicate ground and changed the subject.

"You have a good pair of horses there, Mr. Pearson."

"So they be. I raised the off one myself. The

nigh one ain't so much account. I took him from a feller as could n't pay his board when I kept the tavern."

Mr. Pearson did not have exactly the air of a hotel proprietor, and Paul expressed his surprise.

"That was afore they fixed the tavern up. When the city folks began to come I sold out. They did n't understand my ways, and I did n't understand their'n. I had to take all the bells out the rooms, — they kept o' ringin' of 'em so there warn't no peace," explained Mr. Pearson.

"Then you are a farmer now, I suppose?" Paul said, exchanging a smile with Miss Frazer.

"Yaas. Farmin' summers and loggin' winters. What sort of a country is it down there in Afriky? Mostly grazin' land, I hear, — not much timber."

"That depends upon where you are. Africa is a big country;" and Paul described the veldt, its baked khaki-colored earth, rocky hills, and long thin lines of green along the chocolate-hued streams. Mr. Pearson listened attentively, but seemed to be pursuing his own line of thought.

"Them pious people are a hard lot to tackle," he remarked at the first pause. "Yer can't drive notions so easy as yer can horses."

"Mr. Pearson," said Margaret, as they drew near the gate, "won't you come in and warm your feet? Your boots are soaked through."

Mr. Pearson contemplated the articles in question as if they had no connection with himself.

"They be sorter moist," he confessed. "I ain't had them boots off fer a week, and won't most likely as not fer another. Yer see, boots ain't like traps, — yer gets out of 'em easier 'n yer gets in," he chuckled, reining up at the entrance to Cedar Hill.

"Then you won't come in?" asked Margaret.

"No, thank ye, I guess I'll be gettin' on towards home," he replied in an off-hand manner which hid a sudden attack of bashfulness.

"We are much obliged to you for the ride, at any rate," said Paul.

"Yer welcome," was the reply. "If it had n't been fer them forty-five dollars yer might n't a had it." And with this parting shot he chirruped to his smoking horses and went jogging on under the firs.

Dolly had returned with Dorothy in that tranquil frame of mind which results from unburdening the conscience, and, it must be added, from a somewhat indefinite knowledge of the ways of the business world, fortified by the underlying conviction that all would come out right in the end. As she had said to Paul, her disquietude arose less from the fear of personal loss than from that of having prejudiced her relations with Margaret. Above all things to be dreaded were money difficulties with one she loved.

Margaret's mother had died when her little girl was but ten years old, and thereafter Mr. Frazer had married for the second time. Margaret pos-

sessed a miniature of her mother painted shortly after the latter's marriage, when she still retained the charm of the young girl in the dignity of the young mother. The face was admirably suited to that delicate art. A complexion of dazzling brilliancy, a small arched mouth, sweet blue eyes full of intelligence, a pure forehead under brown hair that curled like the tendrils of the vine, and withal an air of gentle reserve indicating a nature both vivacious and sincere. To Margaret, who remembered only smiles in those eyes and loving words from those lips, it had often been a happiness to find her own childish recollections confirmed by her mother's friends, who always spoke of her in affectionate enthusiasm when they saw their old friend and playmate living again in her child.

Mr. Frazer's second marriage cannot be said to have been an unhappy one, partly perhaps because he did not long survive it. But Margaret, with a natural tact which never deserted her, had lived with her stepmother more happily, in view of their different natures, than might have been expected. Mrs. Frazer, on returning from the short journey which followed the wedding, had said to the little girl of twelve in a decisive tone intended to avoid all discussion, "You will call me mother, dear;" and the little girl had replied with an equally quiet decision, "I will call you mother, and I will call my own mother mamma," — a reply which gave the

keynote to their subsequent relations. It was to Margaret's credit that, as years went on, though her new connection often jarred and sometimes mortified her, she never betrayed it. In a certain way she was genuinely fond of her, although companionship was out of the question. Mrs. Frazer was devoted to dress, with very imperfect conceptions of its propriety; to people, whom, however, she criticised unmercifully; and, while generally satisfied with herself, was never content with her own society.

After Mr. Frazer's death she had roamed the known world over, in independent masculine fashion, in search, now of variety and adventure, now of rest, as she termed it, and finally of the altitude, climate, and waters suited to her constitution. It was strange that the Creator, who had somewhere provided these things for her own peculiar use, should have omitted to indicate where they were to be found. Fortunately Margaret had been left in sufficiently independent circumstances to free her from the necessity of following her stepmother's eccentric manœuvres. That lady, with all her faults and foibles, possessed the redeeming quality known as a good heart. Her unusual candor was without malice, her peculiarities amused rather than offended, and her independence of character and movement rarely interfered with those of her immediate neighbors. One is tolerant of people who are a law unto themselves provided they do not

attempt also to be a law for others. Moreover her angles had worn down with time, a fact which betrayed itself not so much in her forms of speech, which were still as abrupt as ever, as in the good offices which were often in such flat contradiction with her utterances. All her offending was on first acquaintance. She wore well.

Dolly, somewhat prone to take up people with sudden enthusiasms, but on the other hand steadfast as such enthusiasms rarely are, had taken Margaret to her heart at their first meeting, and the visit — which began after Mr. Frazer's death, when Mrs. Frazer started off on one of her periodical voyages of discovery, and Dolly, herself in mourning, was in need of companionship — had been indefinitely prolonged. At certain periods of the year, with great firmness on Margaret's part and some embarrassment on Dolly's, mysterious money transactions were effected between them which Margaret contended were absolutely necessary to her peace of mind. Women rarely take business as a matter of course.

"You are an amazing couple," once wrote Mrs. Frazer to Margaret from Biarritz. "I could not tolerate such a pretty girl as you in my house."

But jealousy was not one of Dolly's faults.

She met Paul and Margaret in the avenue as they returned from the village, and Dorothy, after delaying progress to the house by insisting at fre-

quent intervals on sitting down on her beloved stool, was with difficulty persuaded to renounce it during luncheon.

"The mail came while you were away," said Dolly at the table ; "there was nothing for you, Paul, but I had a letter from the Bishop, who has been preaching at Lemington, and who writes he is coming to spend the night with us. As the Bishop is to be here, and probably Mr. Temple, I thought I would ask the Fishers to dinner. I have just telephoned them, and they have accepted. I shall send the carriage for them. Mr. Fisher is a professor in Lemington College. I must ask Thomas about the horses. I don't understand why horses should be so lame every other day. It's most extraordinary. When I do not want them Thomas says they must be exercised, and then they frighten me to death, they are so frisky. And when I want them dreadfully, they are lame and cannot stir a step."

The butler entered, as she spoke, with two yellow envelopes which he handed to Mrs. Kensett.

"Why," exclaimed Dolly, "here are *two* telegrams ! One is for you, Margaret. I suppose this is from Mr. Temple."

"Yes," said Paul, opening it. "He will be here at seven."

Margaret meanwhile passed her message to Dolly with a queer smile.

“Mercy!” cried Dolly, reading it hurriedly and looking at Margaret. “What a woman she is!”

The message was less laconic than Mr. Temple’s, but equally precise. Dolly read it again, aloud.

Will arrive by evening train. Do send plenty of robes. Such a dreadful cold country.

LAURINDA.

“It’s just like mother,” laughed Margaret. “Her last letter was from Nice, and she said nothing about returning. There is no address,” she added, taking up the telegram; “so I suppose she is on the way now.”

“Certainly she is!” exclaimed Dolly. “One might as well try to stop a bombshell, and I have no inclination to. She and the Bishop will amuse each other famously,” — and Dolly looked at Margaret with unfeigned amusement. “Paul dear, it is from Mrs. Frazer. I am dreadfully glad you are here. You and the Bishop must entertain her. You will tell her all about South Africa. But I must talk this over with Margaret, and shall leave you with your coffee and cigar. Your trunks came this morning, and you will find the papers in the library. Have you everything you want, dear?” she said, kissing his forehead gently, — “everything?” and without waiting for a reply she vanished with Margaret to discuss the unexpected news.

IV

THE dining-room at Cedar Hill was large, rather dimly lighted by windows overshadowed by a broad piazza, and for that reason not used in winter on ordinary occasions, Dolly preferring the sunny breakfast-room that faced the south and east. In summer, however, its four low windows were open to the piazza, itself a summer drawing-room of generous proportions, to which all the life of the house inevitably gravitated. Originally this piazza had been the usual old-fashioned narrow platform where sun and rain disputed possession with any one who risked the danger of falling off its unprotected edge. But Dolly had changed all that. Widened to an extent which had been a source of bitter controversy between the architect and the local builder, bordered by a low wall and parapet from which the nasturtiums talked to the roses that raised their heads to its level from the border beyond, screened from the sun by awnings, and furnished with innumerable divans and easy-chairs in bright colors, whence long vistas of blue hills opened between the trees on the lawn, it lacked nothing, as Dolly said when she surveyed her completed work, but the

shimmer and motion of the sea to make it perfect. On this winter night, when the windows were closed and the table with its glass and silver shone in the softened light of shaded candles, and the black oak paneling winked back at the firelight leaping in the chimney recessed under the Spanish altar-piece Dolly had bought in Toledo, one forgot the summer altogether.

Dolly's guests had arrived just before the dinner hour. The Bishop, a frequent visitor, had gone directly to his room. Paul had met Temple at the station, and after having put Mrs. Frazer into a carriage, had walked back with Jack for the sake of the air and a preliminary talk after years of separation. Professor Fisher and his sister appeared just before dinner was announced. The Professor was a young man of unmistakably aggressive temperament, which betrayed itself immediately, even before he uttered a word. It was difficult in this respect to name the chief offender among the visible elements of his personality. It may have been his manner of easy assumption, as if he were thoroughly at home in all subjects and under all circumstances; it may have been his voice, which had a peculiar rasping quality; or the fluency of his speech, which never lacked the right word, and ran on with an irritating monotony and exasperating precision like a perfectly oiled machine; it may have been his eye, which looked you

directly in the face from behind a very large pair of round glasses. Dolly declared it was his nose, which had a wavelike outline terminating in a sudden upward slant altogether unexpected, and giving the face an expression of constant interrogation. Dolly had invited him to meet the Bishop because he was a most zealous churchman, the Bishop's right-hand man in a college community of rigid Congregationalism, — bishops, like the Creator, having often need of weaker vessels to carry on the affairs of this world. Miss Fisher, whose thin brown hair was brushed smoothly over her forehead, had apparently ceded to her brother all claims to notice. No art of the modiste could have surmounted the difficulty presented by her person, a difficulty arising from an unobtrusiveness of form as remarkable as her timidity of character. But her face was gentle and her voice low, and there was something quite touching in her evident devotion to her brother.

Mrs. Frazer, arrayed in a suit of mail of sparkling jet with a nodding white ostrich plume in her wig and a wonderful necklace of diamonds, stared at the Fishers through her lorgnette with great interest as she took Mr. Temple's arm to dinner.

“You have such lovely silver, Dolly dear,” she said, taking off her gloves and laying them with her fan beside her plate. It was her habit to address such of her friends as she particularly fan-

cied by their Christian names, utterly regardless of any reciprocity of sentiment. "It is very bad taste," she said, turning to the Bishop, "to make such comments. But I like to have people praise my things, and I find it a safe rule to say what you like to hear."

"A silver edition of the golden rule," said the Bishop, who was fond of his little joke.

"You have just returned from abroad, Mrs. Frazer?" said the Professor, who was quite fascinated by that lady, notwithstanding what he considered the very impertinent use of her lorgnette.

"I am always returning from abroad. I have to, in order to go abroad again. One can't stay in one place all the time, you know."

Professor Fisher, whose acquaintance with Europe was confined to the pilgrimage made in his Sabbatical year, saw his cue and took it immediately.

"One of the great sources of superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race," he rejoined, "is, it seems to me, the abstract, I might almost say the spiritual way in which it looks upon home and country. Think of the conditions of the last century in these colonies: two or three millions, of different origins, customs, characters, scattered along the seacoast in widely separated settlements, mutually jealous, — behind them the wilderness and the savage, confronting them the organized power of England.

Refugees and emigrants themselves, surely the idea of country was to them an abstraction. But the Anglo-Saxon does not look upon the fatherland from a material point of view. He loves his acre, yet is not rooted to it. He relies upon his spiritual inheritance, his personal initiative, not upon traditional institutions" —

"Quite so, quite so," interposed the Bishop. "You might remind some of the over-zealous defenders of the Constitution of that fact, — don't you think so, Mr. Temple?"

"The Constitution was certainly written under conditions radically different from those of to-day," replied Jack, with his accustomed brevity and directness. "It was a remarkably well-made suit of clothes at the time, — for a boy, — but is a rather uncomfortable fit for a grown man."

"You are quite right, Mr. Temple," said Mrs. Frazer, her white plume nodding approvingly. "It reminds me of my grandfather's will. He gave his negro servant to his son with the proviso that if he was freed the whole estate was to revert to a theological seminary, and the seminary was to lose it also if ever the creed was modified by a comma. A pretty mess he made of it, trying to tie up posterity!"

"And who got the estate finally?" inquired the Professor.

"I did," said Mrs. Frazer, with a snap of satisfaction.

“Nevertheless, I hold it to be a very lamentable feature of modern life,” pursued Professor Fisher, “this disregard for the sanctity of written documents. The individual” —

Here Mrs. Frazer cut the general conversation short by asking Dolly what she paid her cook, whom she pronounced a treasure, and the Professor was left to finish his sentence to Margaret.

Indeed it seemed to Paul that the Professor’s remarks were addressed quite as much to Margaret as to the company at large, and he felt a nervous irritation as he glanced across the table to see her evincing so much interest in his conversation. “How can she talk to such a cad!” he thought. Unless an occasional monosyllable and smile of assent can be called conversation, this was precisely what Margaret was not doing. An attempt to elicit some information about life in Lemington from Miss Fisher, who had fallen to Paul’s lot in the dinner distribution, had ended in a plaintive description of the difficulties of housekeeping in that community, to which Paul listened sufficiently to enable him to make appropriate replies, arguing with himself the while that it could make no possible difference to him whether Margaret liked the Professor’s society or not. Suddenly his eyes met hers, flashing so quick a smile of comprehension upon him that the whole atmosphere of the room was changed as by magic, and for the first time

he saw how really beautiful she was. To be sure, Dolly had said so in her every letter, but to-night the vision Dolly's pen had so often tried to paint was before him. It had certainly been only a glance of frank amusement, a gleam from her sense of humor, — yet it seemed to create a bond of mutual understanding which was strangely pleasant to him; and that momentary smile, bright itself as a light against the dark shadows of the oak wainscoting, was destined long afterwards to form one of those few vivid pictures which Memory selects to sum up for us the total of the years.

"One must be greatly fatigued after such a long journey," Miss Fisher was saying to Paul as Mrs. Frazer finished a description of her winter passage.

"Tired! not a bit, my child," cried that lady, whose quick ear lost nothing. "The ocean's nothing more than a parlor car nowadays. I rode all through Armenia once, not on a sidesaddle, either."

"A most interesting country," interposed the Professor.

"A most interesting country and a most detestable people, — much worse than the Turk. People who settle the affairs of Armenia in Fancuil Hall had better go there first."

"How *could* you manage a man's saddle!" said Dolly, scenting danger and turning the subject.

"It is only the first step that costs," smiled the Bishop.

"Entirely so, a mere prejudice. A sidesaddle on a rock staircase looks as absurd as an Easter bonnet in midwinter."

"Mrs. Frazer," said Paul, "I am going to disclose a state secret. Dolly was afraid you would be bored at Cedar Hill, and commissioned me to aid the Bishop in entertaining you. You are stealing our rôle."

Mrs. Frazer laughed good-humoredly. "We all love flattery, don't we?" she said to the Bishop, taking Mr. Temple's arm as Dolly rose. "Oh, I forgot, — it's not Continental fashion, and we are to leave you gentlemen to finish your wine."

"Jack," said Paul after the ladies had gone, "I want a little talk with you."

"All right. The Bishop always goes to bed early," replied Jack. "There'll be plenty of time. No, thank you," to the butler who was passing what Dolly, who knew much of vintages, called the Bishop's port.

"Whiskey and soda, sir?"

"No, nothing."

"You have n't changed your habits, Jack. Come over here where we can talk quietly," said Paul, seeing the Bishop fast in the Professor's net. "That idiot drives me mad."

"Who, the Professor? You must let such fellows talk themselves out."

"Talk themselves out! I wish he could. He

began with me on Pretoria and Cape Town, as if they were suburbs. One does n't forget Chicago and New York are a thousand miles apart, if one ever knew it."

Jack laughed. "Never put the lid on a boiling kettle, Paul. He began with me too, on free trade, before dinner,—and he knows a lot about it,—only, as Mrs. Frazer remarked, he has n't been there."

"Jack," said Paul abruptly, "do you know Heald?"

"Heald, Heald?" replied Jack, watching the smoke as it curled from the end of his cigar. "I know who you mean. No, I don't know him personally."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"He goes everywhere," said Jack non-committingly.

"What does the street think of him?"

"Well, I don't think he is taken very seriously. Why? Do you know him?"

"You remember a while ago Dolly drew a rather large check on you."

"Yes. Mrs. Kensett and I have a somewhat peculiar arrangement between ourselves, you know. She mails me her checks, and if her account can stand it I send her the money."

"Yes, I know. Dolly told me about it; and a very sensible arrangement it is, too. Did you ever hear of the Argonaut mine?"

“The Argonaut? Never.”

“Are n’t its shares listed?”

“They may be. I don’t pretend to follow every wildcat scheme on the market.”

“Then it is a wildcat scheme, is it?”

“Now look here,” said Mr. Temple, settling himself back in his chair, “tell me what you are driving at.”

“Well,” said Paul, “the long and the short of it is this: this fellow Heald has invested the money you sent in Argonaut shares for Dolly. He pretends he was a great friend of Kensett’s, and a lot of that rubbish. The shares have gone down and Dolly is scared. She told me the whole story this morning, and I told her I should advise with you. That is why I asked you up.”

“I know nothing about Argonaut. This is the first time I have heard the word since I was at school. But I will look into it directly. The money I sent Mrs. Kensett was income, and she can afford to lose it. Of course I should not have advised her to throw it away if she had consulted me. I told Kensett I would look after her capital as I would my own,—which means, you know, in such a case, better.”

“Yes,” said Paul, “but she has invested other people’s money too.” Jack looked up quickly. “You won’t ask me whose, for although she bound me to no secrecy, I know she would rather not have

any names mentioned at present. The facts are these," — and Paul gave the details of Dolly's morning confession.

Temple listened without a word, and when Paul concluded smoked on in silence.

"He's been cutting a wide swath lately," he said at last; "automobile, yacht, and all that sort of thing. He's not my style, you know. But I have absolutely nothing against him. Are you staying here?"

"For the present. I shall have a lot to do when the war is over, but just now I'm in a dead calm."

"Well," as the Bishop rose, "I shall go down to-morrow. There is a directors' meeting I must attend. You will hear from me in a day or two, and if I want you I will wire. You might give me a memorandum of the number of shares and what they cost."

"One thousand at twenty-five, and one thousand at forty."

Paul expected to see Jack wince a little at these figures, but his face expressed nothing.

"Shall we join the ladies?" smiled the Bishop. And they went upstairs into the drawing-room.

Paul had often declared to himself that, whatever else he might be capable of, he would never struggle with a rival over a woman. There was a brutal reminder of the origin of the race in such rivalry that revolted him. This resolve did not

occur to him now, nor did Mrs. Frazer's suggestion at the dinner-table that one's opinion of a subject sometimes changed on a nearer view of it. But it did occur to him as the Professor with his blandest manner joined Margaret, who was talking with his sister in a distant corner, how utterly unprotected a woman was against the presumption of a bore.

"Come here and sit down by me," cried Mrs. Frazer, as he stood for a moment hesitating in the doorway. "What have you been doing with yourself all these years?" — readjusting her voluminous train to make room for him beside her on the sofa, — "making money I suppose. Have you reached the stage where you are going to retire and be a good-for-nothing? I hope not. There is nothing so lamentable as a man who takes off his harness and gives himself over to elegant leisure. It is of no use to try unless you began as a baby at the bottle. Leisure is quite bad enough for a woman, for a man it is poison. Look at me! I am bored to death. But why don't you marry, eh? Are there no pretty faces in Bul—Bulawayo? You have such queer names down there."

"Why are you women so anxious to marry off everybody?" Paul retorted, laughing. "We should not think of it if you did not put the idea into our heads. Aren't we well enough off as we are?"

"Decidedly not. Much more interesting, I grant you. But we women are quite unselfish in the mat-

ter. Moreover we know much better than you, I assure you, the real meaning of life."

"Perhaps so, — you who have seen a good deal of it."

"No, all of us, who know nothing about it," rejoined Mrs. Frazer, with her customary disdain for logical consistency. "Now listen to me. Woman has an instinctive knowledge of what she was intended for, — mixed up, naturally, with all sorts of foolish dreams and ideals, mere air bubbles on the placid depths of her consciousness. She knows better than you what completes life, what *is* life, and she would rather live it as it was meant to be lived, live it as the plant lives it through frost and drought, from bud to seed, with all seedtime means, than to know and feel and suffer nothing, like a rose in a greenhouse. You may take my word for it. Are we not always rushing into danger more unconcernedly than you?"

"I doubt if we do think so much of these things as you do, if that's what you mean," said Paul, looking over at the Professor.

"What possesses Dolly to ask such people here?" said Mrs. Frazer, following his gaze. "That man positively maddens me. I feel constantly tempted to do something outrageous to shock him."

"Do you?" said Paul, laughing in spite of himself, "so do I."

"I never could tolerate people I do not like," she

pursued, taking a cigarette from a small jeweled case and lighting it unconcernedly. "When we dislike people in a novel we shut up the book. It is a pity we cannot do so in society."

"What is it we cannot do in society?" asked Temple, joining them.

"What we please. But I am not speaking of you. You are an extraordinary exception. You have nothing to say to us and we all adore you. You never accept invitations and every one keeps on inviting you. You are like the Sphinx, — everybody would make a journey to hear you speak, and you say nothing."

Jack's face did not change under this compliment. He detested open praise.

"I have made a good many enemies in my life," he said quietly.

"I am quite content to have the people I dislike for enemies if they will confine their enmity to letting me alone," declared Mrs. Frazer incisively.

The Bishop, who had been meanwhile laying before Mrs. Kensett his plans for the mission church in Lemington, rose to say good-night.

"You must not think," said Dolly, "that I am not interested in what you have been saying. But I must have time to consider it and to consult with Mr. Temple." Her inclinations ran to individuals; charity in the mass appealed less quickly to her sympathies.

“Certainly, most certainly,” acquiesced the Bishop. “I would not press it upon you under any consideration, and I leave the matter wholly in your hands. You have been most generous, and I assure you I am not always coming to Cedar Hill in the guise of a beggar.”

“You will always be welcome in any guise, my dear friend,” Dolly replied. “Are you going to take that horrid early train?”

“I must,” he said, taking her hand, “and you will let me steal away as usual.”

He bade each one good-night, and Dolly followed him to the door.

“You will hear from me soon,” she smiled.

Then the carriage for the Fishers was announced, and every one rose.

“Did I hear the Bishop say he was leaving by the early train?” asked Jack of Mrs. Kensett. “I don’t like to run off so early, but there is a business meeting which I must attend to-morrow” —

He looked away as he spoke. “That is an excuse for going,” thought Dolly.

“What would happen now, I should like to know, if you played truant for once, Mr. Temple?” interrupted Mrs. Frazer.

“Nothing very serious, I dare say. Mabel would lose her gold eagle for one thing.”

“Mr. Temple gives all his attendance fees to Mabel, you know,” explained Dolly.

“No, I did not know it, but I do know he will spoil that child,” declared Mrs. Frazer emphatically.

And then Dolly sent for her fur cloak, which she insisted upon Miss Fisher’s wearing home, the night was so cold; and Miss Fisher thanked her for a “most delightful evening,” and the Professor shook hands ceremoniously, expressing his great pleasure at having met every one, and the ladies said good-night, and Paul went down with Jack to the billiard-room for a final smoke and talk before going to bed.

V

It was nearly midnight when Paul, after leaving Jack in his room, knocked at Dolly's door.

"Have you gone to bed, Dolly?"

"No, come in," she said. "We have been holding an adjourned meeting. Margaret and Mrs. Frazer have just gone."

"It is late," said Paul, sitting down before the fire in one of the chairs evidently just vacated.

"Are you tired?"

"No, not a bit. Jane, I shall not need you any more," and Dolly, with two long braids hanging down over her blue silk peignoir, ensconced herself in one of the two chairs opposite her cousin with her slippered feet on the fender. "How like old times this is! Do you remember how you used to come up in my room, — when we were children?" she sighed.

"I have been talking with Temple about Heald," said Paul, after a pause. "Jack knows nothing about Argonaut, but he has promised to investigate it and to tell me what he may learn. I thought you would like to know, although there is little to be said at present."

Dolly changed her position and put up one hand to screen her eyes from the firelight, but made no reply.

“You said you had something more to tell me, Dolly.”

“Yes,” she replied slowly. “You know I hesitated at first this morning, when you proposed asking Mr. Temple here. It was not because — because of — Mr. Temple has asked me to marry him.”

In the unexpectedness and incompleteness of this announcement Paul found nothing to say.

“You are probably as much astonished as I was,” Dolly went on, speaking to the fire. “A woman is not generally unprepared for such a declaration, but you know how different he is from most men. I had never dreamed of it. He was Cecil’s best friend, and I — I really cannot explain how I felt toward him, — something as I feel toward you, Paul. You are not my brother, and you are not like an ordinary cousin. It would be absurd to say I looked upon him as a father, or a brother, — but can’t you understand? Without a father, or a mother, or a brother, and you gone, Paul, he seemed to be something of everything without being anything in particular. I always felt as much at ease with him as I do with you. And he is so kind, so unselfish, I would not hurt his feelings for the world. When he spoke to me I could not answer him.”

“But you did answer him, Dolly,” said Paul.

“No, I did not answer him,” she said, at length. “I just cried. He said I was not to think of it again . . . that he understood” . . . Dolly hesitated and her voice trembled — “but I do not think he did understand — I do not think I understood myself — I thought it was just surprise and pity, but” — her voice was very low now — “I do care for him.”

Paul leaned forward and took her hand in both his own.

“You ought to tell him so, then,” he said. She shook her head slowly, but did not speak. “Nonsense, Dolly,” he began impatiently. But she seemed to shrink from what he was about to say, and he continued gently, “Why not? if you are sure of yourself, if you know your own heart. Life is not a play in which misunderstandings must be kept alive for the sake of the last act. There are a hundred ways in which you could tell him without — without his knowing that he had not discovered it himself.”

“Hush, Paul, you do not know what you are saying.”

“I know so well what I am saying that if you persist in such folly I” —

She drew away her hand and lifted her eyes to his with such a look that he stopped short.

“Dolly, you are keeping something back.”

“No, I shall keep nothing back from you, Paul. I have been waiting too long for some one to speak to for that.”

She rose as she spoke, and going to her desk unlocked a drawer from which she took a letter which she handed to him. He opened it, saw that it was in a woman's handwriting, glanced at the signature, and then began to read: —

DEAR MRS. KENSETT, — I am so glad papa took me with him to Cedar Hill, where I had such a delightful visit. He is always going away *on business*, and it is so dreadfully stupid to be left alone with Miss Gaunt. Dear papa! I am quite decided never to let him go off by himself again. You have such a lovely house at Cedar Hill, and I think Miss Frazer is charming. It is no wonder you are tempted to pass the winter in the country in such a home, and I suppose the season in town is a very old story to you. To me it is enchanting, and I am having such a gay time. Papa is very good and goes with me everywhere, though I know he is sometimes terribly bored. But I mean to be very good to him. We went to the Daytons' wedding yesterday. I think it is perfectly horrid for a woman to marry a second time, don't you? If any one should ever think of marrying my papa how I should hate her! He is such an unsuspecting dear. That is a point on which I am *quite decided*. I

don't know why I am writing all this to *you*, dear Mrs. Kensett. I only intended to thank you for the lovely time you gave me.

Sincerely yours,

MABEL TEMPLE.

Paul read this letter through slowly, and then again a second time, as if not quite sure that he had at first comprehended it. It did seem quite clear, and the emphasis took on a new significance on a second reading. Yet he made an effort not to think so. "Are you sure you are not reading between the lines?" he asked at length, looking up into Dolly's face.

"Quite sure, Paul."

"What a detestable little cat!" he cried. "One would think you were going to commit a crime. It's despicably impertinent and deadly selfish."

"Oh yes, Paul, I know all you can say," said Dolly wearily, turning her head away and leaning her cheek upon the chair. "How I have thought over it! till I can think no more." Paul rose, walking back and forth behind her chair. "Do you remember," she went on, "how papa forbade us to play even solitaire? and you to smoke? Why did we obey? There was nothing wrong in doing these things. We sacrificed — how much! — to avoid conflict, the unhappiness that would have followed if we had not yielded. We were always giving up

innocent things, submitting to tyranny, while papa was alive, — for the sake of peace. There was no reason why you should not smoke except that you were forbidden to, and there is no reason why I should not marry Mr. Temple except the same insuperable one, — the unhappiness it would cause.”

“Cause whom?” interrupted Paul. “Not him, not you, not a living soul except this little tyrant. And why her? You are not going to injure her. Why should you sacrifice the real happiness of two decent people to the pretended happiness of this — this egoist?” he said, restraining himself. “I tell you what, Dolly,” he continued, stopping in front of her, “if I were to live my life over again I should live it very differently. What did we gain by surrendering our natural rights to egoism and tyranny? Peace, you say. The peace of slaves and cowards!”

“Hush, Paul dear. Mr. Temple loves Mabel.”

“He would n’t if he knew her better.”

“Would you wish *me* to open his eyes?”

Paul found this question hard to answer.

“No,” he said at last, resuming his walk to and fro behind her chair, “perhaps not. You love him, Mabel loves herself. That’s just the difference. And you would not hurt him for the world. But if he knew you loved him, which would hurt him most? Mabel’s selfishness or your silence? Yes, I understand,” replying to her gesture, “he does not know it. You have refused him. He is n’t

much the happier for that, I suppose. He may never find you out, but I warrant you he will find *her* out. Are you willing to have him suspect some day what he lost and why he lost it? Forgive me, Dolly dear," he said, bending over her chair, for he heard the low sobs she tried in vain to stifle; "forgive me, but I don't believe in mysteries and silence. If I were you I would go straight to Jack and tell him the truth, whatever it is. You said this morning it was right to do some things if no one knew you did them. I don't believe it. Tell him you cannot marry him, if you cannot. But tell him you love him, that you cannot marry him *because* you love him. Let him have the consolation of knowing that. He is a man, with sense and judgment. Trust him as having a little of both, — as much as you have. I have never been in love, — perhaps I am all wrong, — but if ever I am in love I hope I shall not lose the judgment of sane people who are not."

There was silence for a moment, and then Dolly lifted her face to his and touched his cheek with her lips. Her eyes were wet, but she had grown quite calm again.

"I must decide all this for myself, Paul. I knew it before I spoke to you, but it is a relief to have spoken. When you know what love is, as you will, you will know if it has no judgment it has instincts, — instincts stronger than any reasonings. I have

been trying to reason, and I am tired, bewildered, — but I always come back to the same point.”

“Have you seen much of her? do you know her well? It is hardly fair to judge a girl by a single letter.”

“I could love any one who would let me,” Dolly said, staring into the fire. “It is not easy to describe Mabel, she changes so. But she interests and fascinates me. I was just beginning to be really fond of her, when this came.”

“Have you answered it?” he asked, as she took the letter from his hand.

“No, and now that you have seen it, I shall destroy it.”

She went to the fire and dropped it on the coals. “If I could burn the memory of it as easily,” she thought, as it burst into flame and shriveled into a little heap of black ashes.

VI

THE Bishop and Jack, having been called in the early morning, had their coffee together by candle-light in the small breakfast-room, and were driven to the shivering little station in the valley as the sun came up over the Westford hills. The Bishop thought it a good occasion to explain his projects for the mission church at Lemington, for Mr. Temple was one of his stanchest props in undertakings of this nature. He also had much to say in praise of Mrs. Kensett, and inquired kindly for Mabel as he shook his companion's hand warmly at the junction where he left the express to take a local train.

The Bishop had known John Temple from boyhood, and was gifted with more than ordinary penetration and sagacity; yet, in common with many who in the battle of life thought they had fathomed Jack and had found themselves to their discomfiture mistaken, had discovered in the latter's even temper a reason for much perplexity. He remembered this morning, after bidding him good-by, and as he walked to and fro on the platform waiting for his train, how profoundly astonished

the world had been at the time of Jack's marriage with Gladys Ferguson, and with what greater astonishment it beheld the ominous prophecies to which that event gave rise fail of fulfillment. It had been conceded that Gladys had not married him for love, and it had been equally clear that she had ended by admiring him immensely. It was not thought on the whole that she managed him, unless a very quick intuition and a very delicate tact can be called management, especially as no one had ever managed Jack on Wall Street. It was contended, too, that he must have been desperately in love with Gladys, for his sudden marriage, though quite in accord with his habit of never taking the world at large into his confidence, betrayed a lack of judgment so wholly at variance with his reputation for that quality that no other explanation was possible. And yet this marriage had remained a mystery. It was an open question, much discussed among their friends of Gladys's sex, whether he seconded her every wish, or whether she deftly suppressed all wishes he did not second. Although so uniformly successful that men consulted him in doubtful matters as they did the barometer in doubtful weather, Jack had been known to make mistakes, mistakes which he bore with a phlegm, or retrieved with a stubbornness which would have done credit to the imperturbability of the conventional gambler ; so that his own even

demeanor rendered conclusions drawn from outward indications unreliable and misleading. And then had suddenly occurred that tragedy which brought his domestic structure down in ruins.

At the time it had proved, like his marriage, a fruitful source of controversy and gossip. Gladys's friends asserted that her suicide was an act committed in the delirium of fever, and had had nothing to do with her cousin Rowan; while her enemies, who had always denied her possession of any such depth of nature as that in which great passions are supposed to flourish, could only reconcile their past and present innuendoes by taking refuge in the confession that human nature was an altogether unknown and unknowable quantity.

It was with a somewhat similar generalization that the Bishop's musings came to an end. Jack's marriage was not the only mysterious one that had fallen under his observation. The human race, he said to himself, is so highly differentiated that the points of contact and attraction are oftenest hidden and unknown. Moreover all this was an old and forgotten story, and if the Bishop's thoughts reverted to the past as he walked back and forth that morning on the frosty platform, they were only like the thoughts of the child on events which took place before it was born. The mystery remained, but it was no longer before the eyes, and the world forgets what it does not see.

The effect of the tragedy upon Jack had been evident to all his friends. Something passed from among the outward signs by which men knew him, as the color leaves the face on a wound; but if he had been hard hit, no one knew exactly where. None were quicker or more efficient than he in practical sympathy for others, yet it was impossible for any one to render such to him. If he had as much need of it as other men, there were also many to give it; but that was his nature, — to bleed internally, — and if wounds there were, they were beyond the touch of ministering hands. Men, and women too, brought him their perplexities and troubles, sought his advice and took his cheer, finding him as accessible, as shrewd, as good-natured as ever, a little more abstracted, the old dry humor a little less quick of flow, but he himself no less ready to listen. Experience may rob us of our illusions, but it leaves us our heritage of common sense, if we ever possessed such, and in Jack's practical world it was common sense, not illusions, which was in demand.

Shortly after parting from the Bishop he got the morning paper. He turned to the stock list and saw that Argonaut shares were selling at thirty-eight. Then he folded the paper and watched the winter landscape as the train rolled on. At the first stop he called the porter and sent a telegram to Mabel, to the effect that he would dine that

night at the Club, and that Miss Gaunt, the governess, might take her to the Opera, where he would join them. The porter, who evidently had had some previous experience with Jack's fees, performed his errand with alacrity, and took the loose change with a "Thank you, Mr. Temple," which left no doubt of his willingness to serve that gentleman in any further capacity whatever.

"I suppose that fellow thinks I have everything I want," thought Jack, picking up his paper again. "I wonder what *he* wants. I could make him happy for life with less than the Bishop asks for his church." Unconscious of his proximity to such good fortune, the porter began to set the folding table in its place and brought the menu. "But the Bishop is right," thought Jack.

On reaching New York he sent his portmanteau to the house and, calling a hansom, drove down town to his office. He went directly to his private room, glanced over the memoranda of callers, listened to such explanations of their visits as had been left with his secretary, and then stepped to the telephone.

"Is this Brown & Sons?"

"Yes, I am Mr. Brown."

"Which Mr. Brown? I am Mr. Temple."

"Oh, good-morning, Mr. Temple. It's Mr. Brown senior."

"Good-morning. Can you drop over to the office in the course of the afternoon?"

"Certainly, Mr. Temple. Now, if you wish."

"Very well, now, if you please."

A few minutes later Mr. Brown was ushered in.

"Brown," said Jack, "what do you know about the Argonaut mine?"

"Nothing, personally. It lies in a good tract, has good company. It's a new property, sir."

"Can you send me the last report?"

"You would n't get much information from their reports, sir. They don't publish details."

"They? who are they?"

"Mr. Heald is the only director I know. I think he is president. The other officers are not known here."

"I see it is not listed on the New York Exchange. Is it listed anywhere?"

"I think not. It has been a curbstone football on the street."

Jack looked out the window for a moment in silence.

"Brown," he said at length, "I want a thoroughly reliable man to investigate and report upon that property. Not here, on the street, but at the mine. Have you any one in your office you can recommend?"

"There is no one I can recommend better than my son, sir," replied Mr. Brown after a moment's reflection.

"That's the man I have in mind," said Jack,

with a twinkle in his eye. "But I was n't sure you thought as well of him as I did. He could go right away?"

"To-night, if necessary."

"It is n't necessary, but I am in something of a hurry."

"All right, sir, it's to-night, then."

"Will you send him over to me? I shall be here till six. And by the way, Brown, this is confidential."

"Certainly, Mr. Temple, certainly."

Within fifteen minutes Mr. Brown, Jr., was standing where Mr. Brown, Sr., had stood, awaiting instructions.

"Sit down, Mr. Brown, sit down," said Jack, wheeling round in his office chair. "I want you to go down to — Where are the Argonaut workings?"

"In Arizona, sir."

"I want you to go down to Arizona and find out all about the Argonaut mine, — from garret to cellar."

"Yes, sir."

"About the *mine*, you understand, not the Company."

"I understand, sir."

"How many dollars it costs to get a dollar's worth of copper, and how many dollars' worth of copper are there."

“Yes, sir.”

“I could get the last report of the Company, if there is one, here in New York. I should n’t send you to Arizona to get that.”

“Certainly not, sir.”

Jack paused, turned to his desk, and took up his pen.

“You may find the information difficult to get, and you may not, Mr. Brown.”

“Very likely, sir.”

“And when you get it you will report to me in person.”

Jack pressed the electric button on his desk.

“Give Mr. Brown the money on this check,” he said to his secretary, “and charge it to my private account.”

“I think he will do,” he said to himself as the door closed on Brown, Jr. “He did n’t ask me where Arizona was.”

There was some work to be done with his secretary, a few business callers to be seen, the directors’ meeting on the floor below, and then he took the Elevated as far as Twenty-third Street, and walked up through Madison Square and the Avenue to the Club.

Jack was not a club man. With the exception of the Yacht Club,—for he loved his boat, and believed in vacations even down to the office boy,—he was a member of but one other, and was so rare

a visitor even in that one that he had a half-dozen invitations to dinner before he got from the coat-room to the dining-room.

“Look here,” he said, as he reached the top of the stairs, “I can’t eat but one dinner, and the only way out of it is for you gentlemen to dine with me. Peter,” he called to the head waiter, “reserve the round table in the corner over there for us. No, never mind the wine card, you know what is good for us,” — and Peter, susceptible to flattery, went off in the best possible humor, much honored, and more than ever persuaded the Club was his own personal property.

There were some murmurs of dissent to Jack’s proposition, for it was customary to consider an informal invitation to dinner as only a bid for one’s company, with equal division of costs.

“We’ll divide it all up if you say so,” said Jack, “but if you will listen to me now I will listen to you at dinner.”

During the evening a good many came to shake hands with him, and to say how glad they were to see him there, and over the coffee and cigars the conversation turned upon the membership in general.

“It’s not what it used to be,” deplored one.

“That’s because you are no longer a youngster,” said Jack. “You have lost your bump of reverence, and are one of the elect whom you used to

look up to. I never admit the good old times are gone while I am on deck myself. Let me see the membership book," he said to the waiter.

"You are not going over the death roll, are you, Jack? This is n't an annual meeting."

"No," he laughed, "I'll begin at the other end and count the babies."

The party at the adjoining table broke up while he was turning the pages, and one of the number, stopping a moment as he passed by to speak with one of Jack's guests, was introduced to him as Mr. Heald. He was a man under middle age, of medium height but well formed, with black hair, teeth of remarkable whiteness, and an engaging smile.

"He's one of the lucky ones," said the previous speaker; "was barely two months on the waiting list. He came from New Orleans, and had n't been long enough in New York to make an enemy when he was put up. If we were to go on the waiting list again, Temple, we should stay there forever."

"It would n't take as long as that to find out enough to blackball me," said Jack.

"Oh, you are one of what the newspapers call financial magnates. Heald's a freebooter."

"What's a freebooter?" asked Jack.

"Probably the dictionary would say a robber. I don't mean that, but a sort of privateer. He has his letters of marque, flies the regular flag, and

doubtless observes the rules of war — I beg your pardon, Jack — business.”

“ I have served on a good many Boards,” observed Jack quietly, “ and I have found the standards of morality as high on the business Board as on any other — higher, in fact.”

“ Ever been on a hanging committee ? ” queried the artist of the company.

“ If I could make five dollars’ worth of paint worth five thousand by signing my name to it, as you can, I should go out of business,” replied Jack.

“ Funny, is n’t it, how every well-to-do round peg thinks he ’s in a square hole,” said the artist. “ I would swap my signature for yours in a minute.”

Jack smiled and threw away his cigar. His business ship had seen many a gale, but its keel had never touched bottom. He was proud of that fact.

“ I am going to give you gentlemen something to growl over right away,” he said, rising. “ I have got a little girl at the Opera and must go and take her home.”

All his friends knew of his devotion to Mabel. “ Do you know,” some one hazarded after he had gone, “ I don’t believe Jack Temple loves that daughter of his. He ’s discharging a duty.”

“ Nonsense,” was the reply. “ He is perfectly

infatuated over her, — if a man can be said to be infatuated with his own child.”

“ Well, I did n’t say he was n’t,” remarked the first speaker. “ Come, let ’s go down and have a game of pool.”

VII

JACK took a cab from the Club, drove to the house, and dressed hurriedly, reaching the Opera at the close of the second act of Hoffmann's *Tales* as Julietta's gondola glided under the balcony to the music of the *barcarolle*. The two occupants of the box were so absorbed as he entered that he stood for a moment unnoticed in the doorway. Mabel's interest was centred on the boxes rather than the stage. Miss Gaunt, her eyes fixed upon the gondola disappearing on the lagoon, was evidently in Venice with Hoffmann.

At what she had then considered the very mature age of twenty Miss Gaunt had exchanged the duties of an assistant in a young ladies' boarding-school for those of governess in Mr. Temple's family. Having been educated — in an institution exclusively devoted to the elevation and emancipation of her sex — to a degree which made self-support a duty she owed to her superior advantages, and having in the process been withdrawn during her sentimental period from the dangers of foolish and romantic attachments, it seemed quite logical after graduating with high honors that she should

immediately put her stores of learning to some practical account. She was one of a large family in moderate circumstances, whose head had deemed it incumbent upon himself to provide for his daughter a means of self-help in the event of a future necessity. In the case of Miss Gaunt a first effort had been made to develop a special aptitude for music, but the foundations for anything beyond a modest accomplishment in this direction proved lacking, and the attempt had been abandoned. Attention had then been turned to languages, with the result that Miss Gaunt could speak two living ones with grammatical rigidity and an original accent, and read two dead ones with much hesitancy and the aid of a dictionary. Mathematics had, however, proved her forte, and her progress in functions was a source of mingled pride and awe to the Gaunt family.

Considerable discussion arose over the question what to do with Miss Gaunt when her education was completed. Not to do something, to permit her merely to live on at home in meek acceptance of destiny, as other girls had done before the days of superior advantages, was not to be thought of. Moreover her college life had stimulated her ambition, and introduced an element of discontent into her composition. The offer of an engagement as assistant in a fashionable New York school presented itself therefore as a natural sequence to her

preparatory training and as the proper reward of her devotion to her studies, and was embraced accordingly.

In the acquisition of four languages, elliptic functions, and her other accomplishments, however, Miss Gaunt had not lost the feminine point of view; for all her teachers had been of her own sex, and however good a point of view of history or literature or discipline a woman's may be, it is not the same as that of a man. Nor had anything in her daily round of duty in college halls given her any real insight into the struggle for life for which she was ostensibly preparing herself. Gradually, and much to her surprise, it dawned upon her that her experience in her new position was not altogether satisfying. To almost the same extent as her pupils she found herself a subordinate wheel in a machine, and the responsibility of performing a definite number of revolutions per day was not that of which she had been dreaming. However modest had once seemed to her the authority and dignity of a simple mistress of a home, she began to realize that wives and mothers possessed at all events certain attributes of power, freedom, and consideration which, as prizes in the struggle for life, were otherwise less easily attained and, when conquered, promised to prove less satisfying.

It must also be noted that in acquiring her superior advantages Miss Gaunt had not lost any

of those natural ones with which nature had endowed her. They had not destroyed her oval face, her rich black hair, her graceful carriage, or her knack of making the most of any slender resource in dress, and her large brown eyes had not been reduced in the pursuit of functions to the necessity for artificial aids to vision. In short the functions, the two living and the two dead languages were only of those things which "shall be added unto you." But it required some time for her to realize that she had been utilizing these excellent things to a dubious end. What the right end was she had not fully determined, but when Mr. Temple proposed her transfer from the school-room to Gramercy Park she did not hesitate a moment.

Mr. Temple *had* hesitated when she was first presented to him. She was both younger and prettier than he expected, or than even she herself at that time considered herself to be. But her family was irreproachable, her recommendations unimpeachable, her accomplishments and character duly vouched for by diploma, and, most conclusive of all, Mabel had taken a great fancy to her at their very first meeting. A good judge of men is not always a good judge of women. There had been Gladys to prove it. Moreover Mr. Temple, except in strictly business matters, was always more shy and embarrassed with women than his outward manner indicated. With his usual prudence, how-

ever, he had asked Miss Gaunt to present herself at his office for the final interview; and there, in an atmosphere where he felt thoroughly at home, after some preliminary details he said:—

“Before we settle our arrangements finally, Miss Gaunt, there are some things which I wish you to understand. If you accept my offer it is as my daughter’s governess and companion, not as mine.” He looked up from his desk, but Miss Gaunt’s brown eyes betrayed no emotion. “You will have your own parlor, and your meals will be served there. I do not mean to imply”—he had in mind to say “any social inferiority,” but paused, and went on as if he had said it, — “in fact, if you are as sensible as I take you to be, you will see that I am thinking quite as much of your own independence of life as of my own. You must be happy in your environment or my daughter will not be. Your chief responsibility will be her happiness and education. Of the servants you will have no care, but should you have complaints or observations to make you will make them to me. Mabel understands that she is to obey you, and you will have absolute authority. Your task will not be a difficult one if you win her respect and love. I suppose your own experience has told you that they are the only foundations for real obedience.”

It was under these conditions and a tempting

increase in remuneration that Miss Gaunt had assumed her new duties, and the temporary arrangement for one year had been indefinitely renewed as the years went by until its continuance ceased to be a subject of discussion.

Her mother had indignantly rebelled against certain provisions of "dear Helen's" contract with Mr. Temple, but Helen had assured her she would not feel as she did if she knew Mr. Temple better, and it soon became evident that in spite of the relegation to obscurity of the elliptic functions Helen was most advantageously placed and most happy. On those rare occasions when she made a visit home it was discovered that she had visibly changed. She had never despised dress, but she now gave more thought to it than before. She no longer appeared concerned for economy, or brought her savings to her father for investment as formerly. On the contrary, she always came loaded with presents and a purse which afforded exceptional opportunities for the entertainment of the younger members of the Gaunt family; and she was quite ready when her visit was over to say good-by.

It was curious that Miss Gaunt should have found herself regarding her former ambitions much in the same light as, when under their influence, she had regarded her present mode of life; and it was an undoubted fact that at twenty-nine, after nine years in Gramercy Park, she considered her-

self younger than when at twenty she presided over a class of young ladies.

On her arrival she had been looked upon by Mabel from a child's point of view and classed with all grown up people, but as time went by governess and pupil seemed to approach each other, the difference in their ages to grow less, until now, when the pupil, who matured rapidly, had passed her eighteenth birthday, the governess had become the companion to an extent never contemplated in the contract, — had, indeed, become Helen instead of Miss Gaunt.

Mabel was Gladys's reincarnation. She possessed her mother's coloring, features, and figure, a pair of violet eyes deeper and more speechful than even Gladys's blue ones, her mobility and quickness of intelligence, but not her tact or, as yet, her depth of nature. Decidedly Miss Gaunt's inferior in solidity of mental equipment, but with much more beauty and force of character, she had never entertained the slightest jealousy of her companion, whom she respected just enough to be at first a little in awe of her, and whom in time she grew to really care for as much as she had yet cared for any one except her father. She was not vain, but very self-reliant, with an unconscious daring which carried her straight to the core of things and persons calculated to inspire awe in a way that dispelled all their awesomeness. Helen had found her a

willful, sometimes peevish and often selfish, child. Gladys had devoted much thought to her dress, and had successfully utilized her as a decorative feature. Seated beside her in the landau, or brought in with the dessert, she was most effective, and very early in life Mabel had learned that for real genuine affection as she viewed it, affection which rarely said no, and which was bent upon gratifying, not denying, her wishes, she must appeal to her father. Gladys passed out of her life, leaving only the sentimental memory belonging to a very lovely vision very rarely seen, and it was only in later years, and under the touch of an imagination which works best at a distance, that Mabel evoked her memory with any real feeling. Gladys herself would have been astonished if she could have seen her own picture as painted by her child's fancy, and the reality of this post-mortem affection would hardly have atoned for the fact that its object was but a phantom of the original.

Mr. Temple had never had reason to complain of his daughter's progress. Mabel possessed a certain brilliancy which might well have blinded his indulgent eyes, were not the eyes of affection blind enough already. She could gallop through a waltz by Chopin in a way which delighted him and scandalized her teacher. What she had learned as a child, as the French and German acquired by ear from her nursery governesses, she had learned

quickly and well, but in all that required application, perseverance, conscientiousness, she was superficial and depended upon her marvelous memory, to the detriment of all thoroughness and accuracy. It pleased Jack tremendously after hearing a new opera to listen to her embroidery of the score — without notes! He had been trained in the school of experience, and what he knew he knew well. What he did not know he set all the more store by, but, not knowing it, was easily impressed and an indifferent critic.

Miss Gaunt saw more clearly, but it was a very ungracious, not to say hopeless, task to set Mr. Temple right, and it was very difficult to be severe with Mabel. For all her waywardness and carelessness and selfishness, she was in so many ways lovable, and substituted so adroitly her lovable qualities for her unlovely ones when a reprimand was impending that she always broke its force. It would have been much easier to deal with Jack's patient, persistent will, or even with Gladys's subtle, persuasive one, than with Mabel's blend of imperiousness and capriciousness, and Miss Gaunt's early efforts at discipline became more and more fitful and gentle. Moulding character, for good at least, was a far more difficult process than teaching the French irregular verbs or the Latin declensions in a fashionable boarding-school.

Then, too, Miss Gaunt was learning as well as

teaching. She was learning how delightful it was to be able to order a carriage, even though it was not her own; how delightful it was to shop without calculating the cost, even though she was shopping for another; how delightful it was to have her own apartments, to be waited upon at her own table, even though it was a solitary grandeur. She could console herself, too, for the neglect of the elliptic functions with the fact that in conversing with Mabel in French during the morning, and in German during the afternoon, her accent in the living languages was rapidly improving. All the advantages were not on Mabel's side.

It had often occurred to Miss Gaunt that this state of affairs could not go on forever, and on one occasion Jack had intimated as much to Mabel. But Mabel had rejected the suggestion with such emphasis that it had never been renewed. For while Miss Gaunt had reached the limit of her capacity as instructress, she was altogether too valuable as chaperon to be dispensed with. When Mabel passed from short to long dresses, abandoned her braids, and began to preside at her father's table, she canceled the clause of the contract which related to Miss Gaunt's ostracism from the dining-room. "It is quite too absurd to think of Helen's eating alone," she had said; and Jack thought so too. He acquiesced because he really liked Miss Gaunt. She never bothered him, never "hung

around," presumed, intrigued, complained, or did any of those things which would have caused him annoyance, anxiety, or constraint. Gradually, and more and more, through her presence at table and as Mabel's chaperon at functions for which Mr. Temple could not spare the time, she came to know Mabel's friends intimately. She was stylish, pretty, well-bred, unpretending, with a touch of timidity highly out of place in a governess but quite winning in itself. Mabel never reminded her of the drawbacks incident to her position, or gave her any encouragement to exercise its prerogatives, and it was very easy for Helen to glide thus insensibly from the relation of governess to that of companion and friend, — to sit, as it were, like Lady Bess, the cat, on the bearskin before the fire in the drawing-room instead of watching for mice in the pantry.

It might have been better for Miss Gaunt had the struggle with life, for whose possible advent her education had been planned, actually come. It might have completed the work imperfectly begun and crushed out the tendency to admire the princes in fairy tales whose acquaintance she made before she began to integrate functions. It was true she had never met these fascinating creations of the story-book in real life, and she would have resented the suggestion that she ever expected to. Mabel, however, had not been long in discovering

the romantic vein under the surface of demureness. It was the demureness of shyness rather than of severity. Mabel delighted in shocking her, because it was so easy. She was never shocked herself, and learned life's lessons so rapidly, and with such quick intuition, that Helen always seemed to her as stupid and naïve in worldly wisdom as she was clever in the wisdom of books. She could be teased, made to blush, and, in case of necessity, blindfolded, — a very precious power to wield over a governess. Mabel reflected impressions like a mirror, whose picture vanishes with the object it reflects; Helen stored them away somewhere like a sensitized plate, cherishing little things which Mabel accepted as a matter of course, and waiting, as some women will wait, all the functions of Laplace notwithstanding, for the sun that can transform the latent impression into a living reality.

VIII

“MABEL, your father is here,” said Helen, as Jack came forward.

Mabel rushed to the rear of the box and threw her arms impulsively about his neck behind the curtains. She was sure she was tremendously fond of him.

“The music is entrancing to-night. You dear papa, to think of me! Where have you been? You did not tell me.”

“I had a telegram from Paul Graham about some business,” said Jack, disengaging himself from Mabel’s white arms and hanging up his fur-lined coat beside her blue velvet opera cloak. “So you have been enjoying yourself?”

“Immensely!” cried Mabel, leading the way back to her seat.

Miss Gaunt rose as Mr. Temple entered, and moved aside.

“No, keep your seat, Miss Gaunt. I will sit behind Mabel.”

“Who is Paul Graham, papa?” asked Mabel. “I never heard you speak of him before.” Her hand stole back into his below the crimson rail, but

her eyes were wandering over the house as if in search of some one. She wore a gown of white satin and tulle with a string of fine pearls. Jack might well be proud of her. Her beauty varied with her mood, and sometimes, when things went wrong, there was a suggestion of sharpness in her clear-cut, delicate features. She had all her mother's taste in dress and her inimitable way of wearing things. Her figure was faultless, and she seemed happy to-night to the very tips of her white-slipped feet.

"Perhaps not. He has been away for years in South Africa. He used to know you when you were a little girl. He is a cousin of Mrs. Kensett's."

"Is he nice?" asked Mabel.

"A lot nicer than some of the men who lead the cotillion with you."

"You foolish papa! don't you know I care nothing for them? I only love to dance. Is he in town?"

"No, he is at Cedar Hill, — till the war is over."

A shadow passed over Mabel's face, but vanished as quickly as the shadow of a bird's flight.

"If he comes to town we must have him to see us," she said absent-mindedly.

"We will, certainly," Jack assented.

A man, standing up in the fourth row of the

orchestra chairs, and who had just entered, bowed simultaneously with Mabel's smile of recognition.

"Who is that, Mabel?" asked Jack, taking out his glasses.

"That man? Mr. Heald."

Then two pretty girls in the adjoining box began an animated conversation with her around the barrier, and Mabel finally rose and joined them.

It was the last thing that could be said of Jack that he was superstitious, but like many a hard-headed man of the business world who is beyond the influence of mere coincidences, they sometimes haunted him. It was strange, he thought, that this man Heald should be thrust upon him three times within twenty-four hours.

"Where did Mabel meet Mr. Heald, Miss Gaunt?" he asked abruptly.

Miss Gaunt had often observed that Jack failed to see the most obvious things, although he endeavored to add Gladys's duties to his own in looking after Mabel. So that while the question was a natural one, there was a directness about it quite unusual, and which appealed to her sense of responsibility. Either because she had grown a little rusty in the exercise of this function or for some other reason she hesitated.

"I think at the Wendells' dance last fall, the first time."

Mr. Heald had evidently recognized Jack, for as

the bell rang for the last act he appeared at the box door.

“I had the pleasure of being presented to you this evening, Mr. Temple,” he said, with a smile which showed his white teeth, “and I came to ask permission to call on your daughter.”

“Certainly,” replied Jack. “My daughter is at home on Thursdays.”

There was nothing else to be said and no reason for saying less.

“Are you enjoying the music, Miss Gaunt?”

“Very much,” she answered, scarcely turning her head. In spite of all she could do the color ran to her cheeks. She was leaning forward on the rail watching the musicians as they came in. Mr. Heald took the seat behind her, bowing to Mabel, of whom he caught a glimpse in the next box.

With an effort at composure Helen sat back in her chair.

“The music is lovely to-night. One gets so tired of Faust and Carmen and Cavalleria. It’s nice to hear something new.”

“It is not a new opera, Miss Gaunt. It was the one given in Vienna at the Ring Theatre years ago when so many lives were lost by fire, and has been on the black list ever since.”

She was conscious that Mabel was observing her, and moved her chair forward, leaning on the rail again and speaking rather loudly.

"The ballad in the prelude is very original," said Mr. Heald.

"Very."

"And the minuet is a gem."

"Yes, it is."

"And the scene with the automaton was very cleverly managed." Helen was silent.

"I wish I had the secret of making automatons speak," he said in a low voice.

She made a quick movement as if some one had touched her. "They are going to begin," she said.

The conductor was opening the score and rapping with his baton. Mr. Heald rose, and as he went out bowed again to Mabel, who was humming the strain of the opening air, tapping the rail with her white fingers.

"Is n't it lovely!" she cried, smiling at him.

"Hush!" said some one in the orchestra chairs below.

"What did Mr. Heald want, papa?" asked Mabel when she had resumed her place.

"Permission to call on you. I told him you were at home Thursdays."

"Rather late in the day," she said to herself; and then aloud, indifferently, "He is dreadfully old, but very good looking. Don't you think so? and very entertaining. You might ask him to dinner some evening, papa."

"I don't know him well enough for that," Jack replied, thinking of the Argonaut mine.

"Oh, Helen," called Mabel that night through the open door of their communicating rooms, "I forgot; papa asked me to write a note to Bishop Stearns inviting him to dinner Monday. Do write it for me, will you, please."

She was sitting before her fire, while her maid was brushing out her long yellow hair.

"Sit down at my desk and I will tell you what to say."

Helen came in, opened Mabel's portfolio, and began a search for note paper. Order and system were unknown to Mabel's possessions.

"'My dear Bishop,'" she began, "'papa desires me to say' — Are you ready?"

"Yes dear, go on."

"— 'papa desires me to say — that he should be very glad — to talk over with you — the plans for the church at Lemington' — I wish that old Bishop would let papa alone! what was I saying, Helen? Read me what you have written, please."

Helen read the first sentence aloud, and Mabel went on.

"— 'on Monday evening. He suggests — that if you have no engagement for that evening — you come in and dine with us — informally — at eight o'clock. He hopes this will suit your convenience —

and I need not add — that it will give great pleasure — to his daughter Mabel' — what a fib! I think he is stupid. Will that do, Helen?"

Helen thought it would, and was folding the written sheet, preparatory to inclosing it in the envelope, when she saw that the reverse side had been written upon. It was a rough scrawl in Mabel's hand, without address or signature; and while this did not give her the right to read it, she had involuntarily glanced at it before she was conscious that she was violating any propriety. When that consciousness dawned upon her she had seen more than she cared to, and having none of Mabel's quick self-possession, she was embarrassed and confused.

"What *are* you doing, Helen? Can't you find an envelope?"

"I have blotted it and must write it over again," Helen said, hurrying into the first lie that came to hand. She re-wrote the note, sealing and directing it rapidly. It was impossible to leave the first one in Mabel's portfolio, for Mabel would know she had seen it, and would suspect her of having done what Mabel certainly would have done herself under like circumstances. She started to tear it up, intending to throw it in the grate, when Mabel dismissed her maid and stood up before the fire for a last look at her pretty self before extinguishing the lights. So Helen thrust it guiltily in the pocket of her dressing-gown and said good-night.

Once in her room there was a battle royal between the powers of light and darkness. Unfortunately and unintentionally she knew the substance of Mabel's letter to Mrs. Kensett already. She might, in her hurried glance, have misconstrued it. At all events she could not take that hurried glance back or undo what had been done. Then she was to a degree responsible for Mabel's good behavior. It was not a pleasant thing to do, to read a letter not intended for her; it was underhanded and mean, — that is, it would be if she were not in a position of responsibility. Her personal preferences had nothing to do with a question of duty. Either it was her duty or it was not. She decided that it was, waited till Mabel's room was dark, took the letter from her pocket, and read it through.

It was a rough draft of the letter Dolly had shown to Paul, a letter which Mabel had clearly not dashed off impromptu, but had considered of sufficient importance to indite with care. To do Miss Gaunt justice it must be stated that she thought it horrid, but all clear ideas of what her further duty was vanished after the duty of reading it was consummated. It might never have been sent. She had not accompanied Mabel on her visit to Cedar Hill, but she knew Mrs. Kensett, who had always been very kind to her and whom she greatly admired. She finally destroyed the letter and went to bed, with a very disagreeable

feeling toward Mabel, a renewed sympathy and increased admiration for Mr. Temple, and the conviction that for the present there was nothing for her to do. She did not fall asleep as quickly as she generally did, and dreamed very disquieting dreams of a rupture with Mabel, in which Mr. Heald took her part, and of returning to a very shabby room in Boston, whose closets contained nothing but calico dresses, and whose windows looked out upon a very small and dingy back yard decorated with the week's washing.

After Mabel and Helen had gone to bed Jack sat in the library far into the night with his cigar. He was very regular in his habits, usually retiring and rising early, a mode of life to which Gladys had never accustomed herself. But to-night the tall clock in the corner sounded its quarter hour chimes ineffectually.

He had never been a great reader. Publishers sent him editions de luxe and reprints of rare old books, which he bought with the same judicious taste that regulated his purchase of other objects of art, for which he had a natural but untrained appreciation. In things of this sort he trusted to a good lieutenant, and did not affect a discrimination he did not possess. Charts and maps, the strategy of campaigns and the tactics of battle were, however, his delight. Novels he never read, except now and then a good detective story. But

he was not reading to-night. He was thinking of the porter in the railway carriage, leaning against the door and staring at him with envious respect as a man who had everything to be desired. Jack did not consider himself unreasonable or grasping. He had taken life as he found it, doing methodically and earnestly the thing his hand found to do. A full house and an empty heart was the sum of it all.

He went back in thought to Gladys, a past which was far enough away now to look at coolly, dispassionately. That had been a sort of Monte Carlo adventure. He did not know she had come more than halfway to meet him. Her beauty, her wit, her nonchalant ease had gone to his head, and never having lost his head before, even in champagne, he had — made a fool of himself? No, Jack never admitted that. A mistake? Yes. A kind of negative mistake, which might have proved a positive disaster had Gladys been purely selfish, less clear in her perception of how far she could go without compromising her retreat. Jack really admired her, her finesse, her intelligence, her assumption of superiority in her sphere, and her tactful surrender to him in his. It was a pity she had never told him how much she admired him.

And he had begun by loving her. But while one may go on for all time desiring the unattained, solitary loving after possession is not among the

possibilities. At first he did not notice that he got back nothing solid, and never admitted it. He would have resented the charge that he did not love his wife as quickly as a girl denies the first emotions of her young love, and with an equally positive belief in his sincerity. He had been all his life the soul of honor in his business relations, and it did not for a moment occur to him to be other than loyal in love, — loyal not only in the common meaning of the word, but in his persistent endeavor to believe that if love, like money, did not bring all the happiness that was attributed to its possession, the fault was not Gladys's. As a busy man, occupied in affairs which absorbed his attention and demanded all his thought, he had no time to brood. Gladys never caused him tangible unhappiness, and, above all, always seemed happy herself, — a fact which made him ashamed of himself when he felt inclined to be otherwise. When decisions were necessary he was ready for them, clear-headed and prompt in action; but he was prone to put away and ignore all the interrogation points of only a speculative value. The whence, the why, and the wherefore of life sometimes perplexed him as they do all the thinking sons of woman; but when these riddles oppressed him, or his second self undertook to cross-examine him and to ask if he was happy, and if not, why not, he telephoned the captain of the Vixen and went on a cruise.

When his friend Cecil Kensett died he had found it necessary to see a good deal of Mrs. Kensett, and Dolly, quite unconsciously, had revealed to him all that other side of womanhood, of genuine self-forgetfulness, of disinterested thoughtfulness, of tranquil domesticity, for which he had yearned. There was no glamour about Dolly. The vision she opened was one of peace,—peace and rest. And the sweeter and clearer this vision grew, the clearer became his realization of how empty his heart was and had always been, how slowly and surely it was filling with the happiness and longing of a great love.

Too late, he thought, flinging his cigar into the ashes. The rest of his life must be given to Mabel.

And yet Jack never relinquished easily a quest on which he was determined. He said "Too late," but the decision of a woman's heart was not absolutely final, and it was only to the inevitable or accomplished fact that he was accustomed to resign himself. He was inclined to trust others, a trait which, taken in connection with his shrewd judgment of character, explained much of his success. But he felt a little at sea with a woman's mood. Good or bad, false or true, he was never quite sure that it was a steady wind, or that his boat would not yaw in the most favoring breeze. It was not distrust, but uncertainty. Down town he probed uncertainties, when he could, to the bottom. But

he could not ransack a woman's heart like an office pigeonhole, or force her hand as it was often necessary to force the hand of a business rival. For the woman he loved he had only gentleness and patience, and neither Dolly's "no" nor his own "too late" ever wholly banished from the background of his hope the picture of her blue eyes and winning smile.

IX

“MARGARET,” said Mrs. Frazer, looking up from her game of solitaire as they sat together in the breakfast-room the morning after Jack’s departure, “what is the matter with Dolly Kensett?”

“What is the matter with Dolly?” repeated Margaret, surprised by the abrupt question. “What do you mean?”

“I mean what I say. Something is wrong. What is it?”

“You may mean what you say, mother, but I do not know what you mean.”

“You never did have the slightest penetration, child,” said Mrs. Frazer impatiently. “It would be perfectly evident to a blind man.”

Margaret laughed. “You are surely mistaken. Dolly would certainly have told me if anything, as you say, were the matter.”

“No, she would not,” replied Mrs. Frazer. “You are altogether too unsympathetic and reserved for confidences, and you never know what is going on about you.”

Margaret laughed again. “Then why do you come to me for information? What makes you

think something is wrong?" she asked after an interval of silence.

Mrs. Frazer was laying down the cards in provoking tranquillity, quite conscious of Margaret's rising curiosity.

"You did not observe that Mr. Temple avoided Dolly last evening as if she were poison?"

"No, I did not observe it," said Margaret, opening her eyes wide. "I do not think it is true."

"You may think what you please, but I have a habit of observing what goes on under my eyes."

"I do not see why Mr. Temple came here at all if he wished to avoid Dolly. Why should he avoid her?"

"Why indeed! My dear child, you are a simpleton."

"Evidently I am. But Dolly has always been very frank with me, and I certainly should not dream of asking her for what she did not choose to give of her own accord."

"Margaret," said Mrs. Frazer reprovingly, "you know I never interfere with other people's affairs. But I see what I see. Dolly is not happy, and Jack Temple knows more about the reason why than you do. I have not been at Cedar Hill twenty-four hours for nothing. Moreover I will tell you something else." She laid down her cards and looked straight into Margaret's eyes. "Paul Graham is falling in love with you."

“Mother dear,” replied Margaret, flushing, “this is too ridiculous. Mr. Graham has been here exactly twenty-four hours longer than you.”

“Well?”

“People do not fall in love with each other in twenty-four hours.”

“Oh, indeed! I have seen that miracle accomplished in five years, — and in five minutes.”

“I am very sorry,” pursued Margaret, paying no heed to the scorn in Mrs. Frazer’s reply, “that you have put any such idea in my mind. I liked Mr. Graham the moment I saw him. He is frank and straightforward, without the least self-consciousness, and makes no insincere speeches. I said to myself at once, ‘Here is some one I shall have for a friend.’ Now you have made it impossible for me to be natural. I shall think of what you have just said whenever we meet” —

“Margaret dear,” interrupted Mrs. Frazer, “you will do nothing of the kind. You have much more self-control than I, and are far less natural in consequence. You will be vastly more natural if you *do* think of it. What I have said is quite simple and proper, for you will find it quite true. What is the use of ignoring facts and beating about every bush! Paul is an excellent and very successful man, and is becoming interested in you. There is nothing remarkable in that. I am not at all sorry to have spoken, for you needed to be put upon

your guard. You may have him for a friend if you wish, but he will have you for more if he can."

"Mother, will you please not speak to me of this any more."

"Certainly not. If that is your wish I am not likely to. I referred to it simply as one refers to the rising moon, — as a phenomenon which obtruded itself on my attention and which will take care of itself. I am not intending to get in its path, but I hope I may be pardoned for seeing it."

Margaret could but smile in spite of her vexation, and at that moment a step was heard on the piazza and Paul appeared at the window.

"Miss Frazer, will you come for a walk?"

Her first impulse was to say no. But one thinks rapidly at such times, and before he could detect any hesitation she had said: —

"Yes, I should like to."

She glanced at her mother as she left the room, but Mrs. Frazer appeared to have lost interest in everything but her game. Going upstairs for her boots and hat, she resolved, notwithstanding what she had just declared, that she would forget all her mother had said, and allow no sign of embarrassment or constraint to escape her. No, she did not believe a word of it, yet the world could not be quite the same if a man loved her, — even though it were a man for whom she did not care. No, she would not believe a word of it. She would never

have exchanged that smile across the table had she dreamed of such a thing. It was too absurd for another thought, and she would not give it a single one. But what did her mother mean in regard to Dolly? She had not noticed anything unusual. Was she then so reserved and unsympathetic? It was true people never came to her with their troubles and gossip as they did to Dolly, and she had often observed how much more Dolly always knew of what was going on about her. She stopped at Dolly's door as she went down, to tell her she was going out with Paul. Dolly nodded and smiled, and hoped it would not snow.

"I am glad you wanted to go," Paul said, as she appeared at the door. "I am so used to an out-of-door life I should have had to go alone. You have good warm overshoes on," he said, glancing at her feet. "That's sensible. The weather does n't look very promising, but I think it will be only a snow squall. I have been studying that road winding up that side hill. Do you know it?"

"Yes, it is the short way to Lemington. The main road follows the valley."

"There ought to be a splendid view up there. Is it too much of a pull for you, do you think?"

"Oh no, indeed," said Margaret. "And I think we might take the dogs."

"By all means," exclaimed Paul. "I did n't know Dolly had any."

“Will you get them, while I go for my riding whip? I don’t use it, but they mind better when I have it.”

He came back with three Irish setters wild with joy at the prospect of an outing.

“Then you ride?” he said, as they went down the driveway under the pines.

“I did, until the snow came.” She felt relieved at his off-hand manner and quite herself again.

“That’s good. We must have some rides when the roads are free. I have lived in the saddle these last years. There’s nothing like it to clear the cobwebs out of the brain.”

“Is it a hard life, in Africa, — at the mines, I mean?”

“Hard? Oh no, but free. It rather unfits one for any other. Any other seems a prison afterwards. I don’t mean it is lawless, but simple. When people herd together laws become necessary and complicated, and freedom disappears. Do you understand what I mean?”

“Oh yes. I used to go into the Adirondacks with papa every year. We had a camp all by ourselves at first. The whole lake was ours. There was not another camp within ten miles. Then some people from New York built one at the head of the carry, and others came in with servants instead of guides, and brought furniture and ranges, and began to make visits, and the whole charm was gone.

There is a steamboat now on the lake, and a hotel, with people who dress for the piazza as if they were really in the woods, — like the people who carry ice-axes when they go up the Gorner Grat in the railway."

Paul smiled. "Yes, I know those people. Then you must shoot, too."

"I used to with papa. Do you?"

"I did n't till I went to Africa. You know my uncle was a crank. He ate game; I don't know why he did n't want it shot. His principles never did agree. I suppose Dolly has told you about him. He bullied us with his principles till — But that's past and gone, and I don't like to talk about it. It is a hard thing to say that any one's death was a relief, but his was. If ever any one had cause to remember a date Dolly and I have. But the date of my uncle's death is the only anniversary in the family we never can recollect. You must not let me speak about him, or you will want to shoot me for a bear."

"I am not such a Nimrod as that," said Margaret, laughing. Then they went on in silence for a time in the sombre pine woods through which the road wound; but the constraint she had feared did not come.

"Tell me about your camp life, Miss Frazer. Did you ever shoot a real bear?"

"No indeed! Papa always went in long before

the season was open, and we only shot for camp supplies. Except for the guides we were all alone, so I went everywhere with him. I shot my first deer at night, floating, with an old coffee pot with two candles in it on my head for a 'jack.' It isn't considered very sportsmanlike, I know, but it's thrilling. Papa taught me to use a fly, and to set the hooks for the big trout in the lake when we could not troll, — and a great many things girls are not supposed to like to do. But I was young and enjoyed it tremendously. And oh, how delicious the hunger and fatigue of the woods are! to go to sleep at night with the great logs blazing before the tent door. Papa had a lean-to, just like the guides; but he took in a tent for me, with a clean board floor."

"So you could keep house."

"Keeping house is rather nice, I admit. It is our province, you know."

"Then I judge you had none of the difficulties with servants Miss Fisher told me about last night."

"Did she?" asked Margaret, glancing at his face.

"She got me on a subject I didn't know much about," said Paul, "and I was floundering around most miserably when I caught your eye. She seems a nice little thing, but I must confess I think her brother's a cad. I am quite unreasonable about

some things I had a surfeit of when a boy, — sermons and speeches, among others.”

“You will like Professor Fisher better when you come to know him. He has an unfortunate sense of inferiority with strangers, and tries to make up for it by being pompous. I am sure you will find he improves on acquaintance.”

Margaret was thinking as she spoke of what her mother had said, and so far from being made shy by the recollection of it, she was emboldened half unconsciously to take the opportunity of testing her mother’s statement by seeing what effect such praise would have.

“I dare say you are right. The best in us does not always show up at the first touch.”

His reply reassured and pleased her. She was as certain as he had been the night before that she disliked the petty jealousies of lovers.

The road climbed steadily through the woods, which shut out the horizon. As they emerged from under its last trees and saw the storm sweeping down the line of hills, Paul stopped.

“I don’t think we had better go on,” he said. “The wind is coming up, and that cloud has ice in it. It will be short but sharp, like a thunderstorm in summer. If we turn back through the woods we shall have shelter.”

“It is too bad to give up when we are so near the top,” said Margaret.

The sun was still shining gloriously, and only here and there a hurrying mist of surface snow told of the rising wind.

“Do you think it will come this side the hill? It can only last a few minutes. But we will go back if you think best.”

“We can try it,” said Paul, who disliked to preach prudence to her courage. “As you say, it cannot last long.”

So they went on. A thin crust overlaid the snow, shining under the sun like a burnished mirror. To the west and south the sky was clear, while far away to the north, under the ragged line of cloud, a yellow light showed the limits of the storm. Swaying to the wind like the drapery of some mighty unseen figure, the veils of falling snow swept up the further slopes of the hill. There was still a chance that its rocky buttresses might shoulder them off into the valley beyond. One could see from the smokelike clouds of driven snow drifting away from the summit that the fight was on, and that the wind was sweeping the crest bare.

“How magnificent!” cried Margaret. “It is worth coming to see. Shall we wait here till it passes? There will be no view up there now.”

They were still in the sunshine and scarcely felt the wind, but the words were hardly out of her mouth when sun and sky were blotted out in a furious rush of whirling sleet. It required all her

strength to keep her feet, to breathe, and the sharp crystals stung her face and neck like the lashes of whips. She had instinctively turned her back to the blast, but could neither see nor speak, when suddenly everything became black, she felt something warm and thick over her head and shoulders, and heard Paul's voice: "Walk straight ahead. I'll keep you in the path. It will be over in a minute."

She stumbled on through the drifts, steadied by the push of the guiding hand on her shoulder. The relief was so great that she could not protest.

"There! it's all over. It was nothing but a bluff," said Paul, drawing back the coat he had thrown over her. She was far more beautiful now than in the candlelight of yesterday, — struggling for her breath, her cheeks aflame, her hair and lashes white with the sleet. He saw there were two brown splashes in her eyes. "Were you frightened?"

"Frightened? No," she gasped. "I had n't a faculty left. It was so sudden."

"It was a bit sudden," laughed Paul, putting on his coat. "I thought you were going to be blown away."

"I think I should have been if" —

"But you are all right now," he interrupted. "You can see the house down there in the sun. We might go on but for the drifts."

He brushed the snow from her neck and hair with his handkerchief and turned up the collar of her jacket as he spoke. It was the first time in her life a man's hand had cared for her, and she felt the strength and gentleness of its touch all the homeward way.

"You have the right to say 'I told you so,'" she said, as they started back again. "It was quite my fault."

"There's no blame where there's no harm. You see, one never can tell in the valley what is going on on the heights. I am glad I was with you. Are you warm now?"

"Oh, quite. Are you?"

"Quite."

After conquering the hill bastion the storm swept down on the defenseless plain, blotting out the houses of Westford, racing southward; and before Paul and Margaret reached the wood they were under blue skies again.

"How would you like to have one day with the grouse, Miss Frazer? It is late, but there are two weeks yet before the season is over."

"Is not the snow too deep in the woods? If not, I should like it very much."

"I don't think it is. The pastures are bare in places."

"You might ask Mr. Pearson," suggested Margaret. "He is the local authority. He used to

go out with Mr. Kensett. He lives just there in the hollow, where you see the smoke. We can go home that way."

"That's a good idea!" exclaimed Paul. "I remember seeing the road as we came out of the woods. I wonder if there is a light gun for you in Cecil's outfit."

"There is Dolly's. I can use that."

"Dolly's?"

"Oh, Dolly would not touch a gun for worlds," laughed Margaret. She felt a strange exhilaration and stepped on air. Was it the struggle with the storm? "Mr. Kensett hoped she would learn, and bought her a hammerless beauty. I think she fired it once."

"I am surprised she even did that," said Paul. "She never was fond of powder."

"Perhaps it is not true of men, but if women do not begin early with such things they never take them up at all. Dolly rides well, you know, but I am sure she would not begin now if she had not learned as a girl."

At the edge of the wood they turned into the lane leading to Mr. Pearson's.

"Are you a good rider?" Margaret looked up quickly, but he went on in his matter-of-fact tone. "Only a good rider knows what good riding is."

"I really do not know," she replied frankly. "I have always had horses that suited me, that I

knew and loved. I might not pass the test in a trial of strength with a brute."

"Would you try?"

"I might, if there were no critics about."

"You ought not to. Never take a needless risk," he said abruptly.

Margaret made no reply, but she thought he did not look like one who would practice what he preached.

At the top of the rise they saw the Pearson homestead, and Mr. Pearson himself, who, with the assistance of his son Jim and a sorrel horse which plodded dejectedly along its endless treadmill path, was sawing wood for the Westford market.

"It's purty late in the year," he remarked in answer to Paul's query. "What do you say, Jim?"

Jim said he guessed there were birds enough for them as knew where to find 'em.

"They 're mighty well scattered now," continued Mr. Pearson. "I seed a few lone ones in the run when I come through with this load of wood. They 're mostly in the runs now, or on the edges where the sun lies. They come right down here to the house o' nights, buddin' in them yaller birches and apple-trees."

There was a pause much appreciated by the sorrel, during which Jim stared hard at Margaret.

"Miss Frazer and I would like to get a shot,"

said Paul. "Could you take the dogs with us, say to-morrow, if the weather is fine?"

Mr. Pearson sat down on a log and deliberated.

"Fact is," he said at length, "I ain't done much shootin' since Mr. Kensett quit. But you can have Jim most any day. His eyesight's better 'n mine."

"Well, then," said Paul, turning to Jim, "what do you say to to-morrow?"

"All right," assented Jim. "I guess I can find some."

"What about the snow, Mr. Pearson?" asked Margaret. "Is it deep in the run?"

"Waal, I reckon it ain't none too deep fer them as wants ter go, Miss Frazer."

So it was arranged that Jim should be at Cedar Hill at seven the following morning.

"That's a mighty nice girl, Jim, that Frazer girl," said Mr. Pearson, as Paul and Margaret went up the lane. "What's more," he added, in the intervals between the buzzing of the saw, "there's more folks than you and me thinks so."

"It really seems as if the dogs know what we have been talking about," said Margaret, as they turned into the driveway of Cedar Hill. "See how happy they are."

"I think they do," Paul replied absent-mindedly.

They went on in silence under the firs. A sudden constraint had fallen on them both. She was slightly in advance, and as he looked at her slender

figure in the black jacket with its collar still turned up under the dark brown hair he kept repeating to himself, "Who are you? Who are you?"

"What are you thinking of?" he asked suddenly, aloud. She turned her large gray eyes full upon him in a sort of bewilderment. She felt her throat swelling, yet her voice was perfectly steady.

"I do not know," she said slowly.

They went on through the short open space without another word. Dolly nodded to them from the window where she sat writing and met Margaret at the door. When Paul came in, after tying up the dogs, she was at her desk again.

"Did Miss Frazer tell you of our plan for tomorrow?" he asked.

"No," said Dolly, "what plan?"

Paul told her. "Will you go too?" he asked. He knew very well she would not.

"I? I wouldn't touch a gun with my little finger. But I tell you what we can do." She laid down her pen. "You are going up the run behind the Pearson farm? that is where Cecil used to go. There is a sugar camp at the head of the run in the maples. It is an old log house, but there is a chimney in it, and I will send out in the morning and have a fire built. We will meet you there for luncheon, then you can go on in the afternoon if you wish to."

"Can you drive there?"

“Easily.”

“Then you might send a sleigh for us later. I don’t know how Miss Frazer will stand an all day’s tramp. However, we can decide that at luncheon.”

Dolly had it on her tongue’s end to ask him if he did not like Margaret, but refrained. He was vaguely conscious that she wished him to. Twenty-four hours ago, had she intimated as much, he would have laughed at her. Now he would have liked to have her speak of Margaret. But she was discreetly silent. He wandered about the room restlessly for a while, glanced over the New York evening papers on the table, and finally declared he would go and have a look at the guns. While engaged in their inspection he tried to remember what he had said to Miss Frazer. So far as he could recollect — nothing. Many a time afterwards he endeavored in vain to recall that nothing. Not to remember the beginning! the beginning of all that changed the current and meaning of life.

When Margaret reached her room, of all they had said and talked about just one sentence remained. It came back when other thoughts were uppermost; it came back when she refused to think at all. “I am glad I was with you.” As a young girl she had assumed as a matter of course, but without thinking over-much about it, that she

would be married, as most of her school friends had been, before reaching what seemed then that distant milestone of twenty. She had had more than her share of admiration, but none that had touched her heart. She possessed none of those lesser ambitions which sometimes persuade a woman that they and the heart's wishes are in accord, and too much rectitude and sincerity of nature to drift into false situations. Gradually and insensibly, with a logic as irrational as had been her early conviction to the contrary, she came to believe she would not marry at all. She was too healthful of mind and body to be swayed by such a belief from normal living ; although sometimes, after her father's death, life looked a little lonely and sad. And now, suddenly, a whole world of glorious possibility opened to her. Was it to be hers after all? Did she wish it? Oh yes, she wished it, with all the passionate force of the thirst one spring only can quench, and the consciousness of it forced its way through every barrier, and wrung the admission from her by virtue of its very truth. She took one swift look at the wonderful vision, and then crushed it out of sight and thought.

If it had been any other rightful prize of life she could have taken every rightful step to possess herself of it. But from love, the dearest prize of all, she could only shut her eyes and bar her thought. Yet the tide of a new joy ran deep in her heart.

X

IT was natural for Dolly to lean. When her course was plain she went her way resolutely, but she was not one to grapple with uncertainties or hew a path through perplexities with instant decisions. She loved straight roads. At the crossways she faltered. Her natural instincts were so simple, and generally so true, that complexity of any kind took her by surprise. She was continually looking at life as it ought to be, and continually finding cause for indignation that it was otherwise. Her own had been so free from obstacles that when they presented themselves in an uncompromising form she recoiled. She had appealed to Paul, but he had not convinced her. Before taking any step she always wanted everything perfectly plain and clear, — as few things ever are. It was this longing for a straight road out of perplexity that impelled her to seek counsel, and she still felt that desire for companionship which leads the patient to surround himself with friends upon going to an operation he knows he must in the end face alone. If we could only take chloroform for difficult tasks and wake to find them done!

On the slightest provocation she would have unbosomed herself to Margaret, in the vague hope that Margaret would see some course she could not discern herself. But dear as Margaret was to her, she did not invite confidences of this sort. The more Dolly reflected on Paul's advice to speak to Jack the less it commended itself to her. She felt that it was with Mabel she had to do, not with Jack ; and while Paul was inspecting Cecil's guns in the billiard-room, this thought took concrete form.

She was still bending over her desk when he came back, and the distress in her blue eyes as she looked up at him caused him to stoop and kiss her. He knew what she was thinking of.

"I wish I could help you, Dolly dear," he said.

She folded the sheet on which she had been writing, and answered him with a smile.

"I am not going to take your advice, Paul ; but what you said has suggested something which I think is better. I love Mr. Temple, — so much more than I thought." Her voice was low, but her eyes bright with conviction. "I am going to see Mabel."

"To see Mabel?"

"Yes. If I cannot conquer her before I cannot expect to afterwards."

Paul thought for a moment. The implication in Dolly's "before" and "afterwards" amused him.

“And if you do not conquer her?”

“I shall,” said Dolly. Decision had brought relief and the courage of action.

“Do you mean you are going to New York?”

“No, I shall ask her here.”

Paul inwardly approved of fighting battles on one's own ground, but did not say so.

“Suppose she declines?”

“I do not think she will,” replied Dolly slowly.

“Do you mean you have any reason for thinking so?”

“Only a woman's reason. I want you to be very nice to her, Paul, and to forget what I have told you.”

“Of course I shall be nice to her, for your sake. But I should like to give her a good shaking. She deserves to be told how desperately mean and selfish she is, how utterly unwarranted and impertinent her interference has been, and made to realize what consequences it might have had, — and may have yet.”

“Then you approve of my plan?” Dolly said after a pause.

“Why yes, I approve of it; I approve of anything except sitting still and being ridden over. As I told you last night, I should have gone straight to Jack” — Dolly shook her head — “but you are perhaps the best judge of that. You may be sure of one thing though, Dolly, — that I shall not see

Jack Temple again without being tempted to tell him the whole story, and put him out of misery. You think it would pain him to know about Mabel. What's that, against the happiness of knowing you love him!"

"Misery?" repeated Dolly.

"Well, I should call it misery to be told by the woman I loved that she did n't care for me."

"Would you, Paul?"

"Certainly I should," he said, going to the window and drumming on the pane impatiently.

Dolly looked at him as he stood with his back toward her and smiled inscrutably.

"Would you like to read my note?" she asked at length.

Paul turned and took the folded sheet from her outstretched hand.

MY DEAR MABEL (it began): I am inviting a few friends for the Christmas holidays to Cedar Hill. It would please me very much if you would be among them, with Miss Gaunt. My cousin Mr. Graham is with me now, and Margaret's mother. I am not asking your father, for this is to be a young people's party, and if there are any among your friends whom you would like me to invite, do give me the pleasure of adding them to my list.

Sincerely yours,

DOROTHY KENSETT.

"I don't believe she will come," said Paul tersely.

"We shall see."

"What do you propose to say to her?" he asked, handing back the note.

"I don't know yet — that is, I know what I shall say, but not how I shall say it."

And then Mrs. Frazer came in with her solitaire and began to spread the cards on the large library table.

Mabel found Dolly's note beside her plate at the breakfast-table. She was late, as she usually was on all occasions, being one of those who avail themselves of every day or minute of grace. She recognized the handwriting on the envelope at once with a secret flutter of excitement, — was it to be peace or war? — and honored the pale blue missive from Cedar Hill by selecting it from among her other letters for first perusal. She read it through twice carefully, and decided that it was war. Its friendly tone did not deceive her an instant. Mrs. Kensett was not stupid, and could by no possibility have misunderstood her. She handed it carelessly to Helen, and asked her if she would like to go. Jack, who had finished his breakfast, was buried in the morning paper.

"It is very nice of Mrs. Kensett to invite us so soon again," said Mabel, who seemed to forget that Helen had not gone before.

"Very," said Helen; and then, after a momentary hesitation, "Shall you go, Mabel?"

"Go? of course. We had great fun there the last time. Besides, I want to see the South African."

Helen was bewildered and said nothing. She entirely disapproved of Mabel's conduct, but she could not help a certain guilty admiration for her easy self-confidence in a matter which, had she herself dared the same interference, would have cost her endless tears and anxiety. She had encountered at the very outset Mabel's air of indulgent superiority. At first it had amused her, but as the child grew into the woman it annoyed her. It was not a malicious or supercilious assumption, and so did not positively hurt, but it did often produce in her that disagreeable feeling of not being at her best. She had not resented it, chiefly because Mabel did not entertain the slightest idea of possible opposition, but the mere consciousness of Mabel's stronger will embarrassed her when there was no other cause for embarrassment whatever.

"Papa," remonstrated Mabel, "do put down your paper. Mrs. Kensett has asked Helen and me to a Christmas party at Cedar Hill. Here is her note."

Jack read it and said Mrs. Kensett was very kind. It was the same comment which Mabel herself had just made, but Helen observed that a

faint smile of mingled amusement, pity, and scorn passed over Mabel's face.

"I don't like to leave you all alone, papa dear," Mabel said doubtfully.

"I would much rather have you go than not," was his reply. ("Would you," thought Helen, "if you knew?") "I shall take the opportunity to go down to the Island and see the Vixen. The skipper says she needs a lot of overhauling."

"Whom would you ask Mrs. Kensett to invite, papa?"

"Oh, I leave that to you, as she did."

"Suggest some one, Helen," said Mabel.

Helen thought for a moment. "There is Florence Wilson" —

Mabel made a pout of decided disapproval.

"We can ask one man and one girl, don't you think so, papa? There is plenty of room at Cedar Hill."

"I should write Mrs. Kensett that in sending any names you are carrying out her own suggestion, but that" —

"Certainly, certainly," Mabel broke in.

"How about Spencer Willis?" suggested Jack.

"He's a nice fellow."

"I think he is horrid!" exclaimed Mabel.

Jack laughed. He did not mind how horrid she thought him. "Settle it among yourselves, then," he said, "it is not my party. But I must be off."

He stooped to kiss her before going. "Good-by, dear. Good-morning, Miss Gaunt."

"I tell you whom we will ask," said Mabel when the door was closed: "Mr. Heald and Constance Montrevel. She's tremendously amusing with her little snub nose and French accent. Will you please write for me, Helen? No, on second thought, I will write myself. It will be more polite. You are n't eating anything this morning, Helen. Pass me the rolls, please."

No, Helen was not eating anything. She was feeling miserably. It was all very well when Mabel was a little girl to tamper with the Dresden clock and tease Queen Bess, but it was quite another thing, having reached years of discretion, to trifle so light-heartedly with serious things. Moreover she had an appointment for that afternoon of which she had said nothing to Mabel. Why, she knew well. There was an exhibition at the Academy, and Mr. Heald had asked her to go with him. He had called Thursday, and Mabel, in her most capricious mood, had been alternately alluring and elusive. Sometimes she believed Mabel had no heart at all, and at others a chance word or generous mood reversed this estimate, and made her feel there was a very big heart slumbering under the surface and biding its time. Mabel's treatment of Mr. Heald had mystified her. She had a good deal to say against him. That was not to the point,

but rather that she talked of him at all. She always gave him the dances he asked for, and he had led the cotillion with her at the Wendells'. Now she had secured his invitation to Cedar Hill. At one time Helen had been sure Mabel cared for him, and this had caused her no little anxiety; for while there was nothing clandestine in their meetings, Mr. Heald was not then a caller at Gramercy Park nor a friend of Mr. Temple's. Mabel had never given her any clue to her real feelings, and she had never dared to question her.

But this was not what made Helen miserable. Lately, and for the first time in all her relations with Mabel's friends, Mr. Heald had in some indefinable way made her feel that he was looking at *her* over Mabel's shoulder; that there was something between them, something no one knew, — what, she did not know herself, — but *something*, — something which made the one waltz she gave him more than all the dances he had on Mabel's card, and sent her to bed after the Wendells' ball with a fluttering joy in her heart which made her close her eyes to shut out what she did not dare to see. And when they were shut she had the most extravagant and improbable dreams, of independence and freedom from all the luxury that was not her own, of surprising the family in Boston with a tremendous piece of news, of turning the last page of the book of being nobody, of having something

of her own, her very own, — and then her heart leaped and her eyes opened wide in the darkness, and she turned over on her pillow and tried to persuade herself that she was very silly.

With the morning light the dream moved a little farther into the background, but it was still there. She took a new interest in the most insignificant things, above all in herself, in the long hair she was brushing before the mirror, in the face looking back at her, beyond which, in the mirror's depths, was the dream.

It was Monday. Mr. Heald had called Thursday. She had known he would, for she had heard him ask permission on the night of the opera. To Mr. Temple he had said "on your daughter," but that was not what the words meant to her. And he had asked her to meet him to-day at the Academy, and she had consented. She was pouring tea for Mabel, as she usually did. He had said nothing to her — indeed, she had avoided him — until he asked her for a cup of tea. But his presence, in the room even, made her nervous. She knew he was coming, just as a dozen others had come during the afternoon, — yet not as the others, — and her voice trembled when she asked him the conventional "Cream or lemon?" She did not remember now which it had been. He had put her quite at her ease, however, and they had talked about Boston, the new Public Library, and the

Puvis de Chavannes frescoes, and so of the pictures at the Academy.

And then she had promised to go.

What troubled her now was that she had not said anything to Mabel. She was not obliged to consult her about her comings and goings, but she always had. Why not now? She had the guilty conscience of concealment, and of stepping into Mabel's place. Still she had kept silence. To admit any obligation to tell Mabel where she was going, that it would be more fair-minded, would be to admit a great deal more than she was prepared to. In the sunlight the dream had almost faded out of sight. Yet she was miserable. Objects which disappear in a glare of sun are not annihilated.

What did he mean by making automatons speak? All the significance of that sentence was in its tone, and his manner Thursday afternoon at the tea-table had been quite natural and ordinary. The recollection of this was like a draft of cold air. But that lasted only a second. She *knew*, and she went to the Academy for the sheer joy of knowing more.

She dressed herself with unusual care. Mabel had told her that her hat with the black plumes was the most becoming one she had ever had; so she wore that, with a dress of soft dove gray, and a turquoise star set in diamonds Mr. Temple had

given her Christmas. She did not look twenty-nine, and she did not feel so.

She told Mabel she was going out for a walk. They were going to a dance that evening, and Mabel was lying down.

“Remember the Bishop is coming to dinner to-night,” Mabel called out to her as she closed the door.

It was early and she walked through to Broadway to consume time, looking in at the shop windows. It seemed as if every one who looked at her knew where she was going. Turning into Twenty-third Street her heart began to beat. Then she told herself she was a little fool, and quickening her pace went up the steps, pushed aside the green baize door, and went in.

The Exhibition had been open for some weeks, and there were but few persons present. No one whom she knew. She walked through the first room and turned into a side one. There was no one there except a little old, near-sighted man with his nose in the catalogue. She sat down on the circular seat in the centre of the room and waited. The thought that he might not come occurred to her, first as a relief, then, as the minutes went by, with a dull pain. There was a large picture on the opposite wall representing a procession in the streets of old Rome, — perhaps a general returning from Gaul or Parthia with his victorious legions,

erect in his chariot behind four prancing horses, and preceded by slim young girls in floating draperies, dancing and strewing flowers. The sunlight was so strong, the tones so clear, the atmosphere of joy and triumph and force so real, that it created a sort of illusion, making the room seem dingy, the streets she had just walked commonplace, and life sordid and mean. She had bought a catalogue in the vestibule, and she opened it in search of the explanation, when a voice behind her said : —

“ Ah, here you are. What do you think of the pictures? ”

“ I have just come. ”

“ And I have been looking for you everywhere. ”

She had been startled after all, and her cheeks were hot with color. His eyes were full of admiration, and no wonder. There was something just short of beauty in her face, something charming and appealing, a perfect foil to Mabel's imperiousness.

“ Have you? I came directly here, and then this picture fascinated me. I was trying to find it in the catalogue. ”

“ You have stumbled on the worst one in the whole collection. ”

“ The worst? ” She looked up at him inquiringly.

“ Not the worst painted, — I think it is the best, — but the worst ethically. ”

He had thrown her off her guard and interested her.

"Ethically?" she repeated.

"Yes, the triumph of brute force, the saturnalia of victory."

"I like it. I don't understand you."

"No, you were not moralizing, you were feeling."

"Yes."

"Listening to the songs of joy. Any kind of intense joy is uplifting."

"Yes."

"And it made modern humdrum New York, teas and dances and receptions, all the petty round, seem commonplace and shabby."

"Yes, that is what I was thinking."

"I don't wonder. It *is* commonplace and tiresome."

"I did n't suppose you would think so," she said, looking up into his face again with interested sincerity.

He laughed. "Well, you mustn't tell. You are the only one who knows it."

"But you do."

"Decidedly. And so do you."

"I had n't thought of it before," she said, turning to the picture again.

"No one knows what one really thinks, or feels, till a picture, a something, — or a somebody, —

comes to tell us. Then the curtain of the commonplace we have been staring at contentedly rolls up and the real play begins."

Her eyes went back to his, smiling. "Oh, but *that is* the play, the illusion."

"Are n't illusions better than most realities?"

"No, — not real illusions."

He laughed again. "You like best the illusions that turn out to be realities. So do I."

She laughed too. "You are talking nonsense now," she said.

"No, I was only asking you not to ring down the curtain. We shall be back in New York again soon enough."

"Yes," she said. "The Bishop is coming to dinner, and we are going out this evening."

"To the Wendells'?"

"Yes. It's their last dance. They are going abroad."

"So am I."

"Are you?" She started imperceptibly and looked up at him.

"To the Wendells', not abroad. I wish I were."

There was silence, and Helen, looking intently down the long Roman street, saw her dream advancing beyond the dancing feet and waving hands, the rods of the lictors and the soldiers' helmets. And then something daring flashed upon her, and

the silence pushed her on, and she took the leap.

"If teas and receptions and balls bore you" —

"I did n't say they bored me. I said they disgusted me."

"It's the same thing."

"No, it's not the same thing, it's more. But it's true. They do. You were saying" —

She had been going to retreat. His question brought her back.

"That I know of one ordeal before you of which you are ignorant."

"Really?"

She was laughing again now, looking at him over her muff.

"Yes. You are going to a house party at Mrs. Kensett's."

"How do you know?" he asked, surprised.

"Because I do."

"I shall not be bored by that," he said, "but I am surprised. I have n't seen Mrs. Kensett for an age, since last summer in fact. I don't know why she should invite me."

"I did n't say she had, as you say," said Helen maliciously.

"I don't understand you, as *you* say," he retorted.

She had taken the plunge and there was no retreat now.

"Mrs. Kensett asked Mabel to send her the names of some people she would like to have invited, and she sent yours."

She endeavored to speak unconcernedly, but the steadiness of her voice was a forced one, and the eyes above her muff were shining. She was frightened now, and felt her face growing hot. If she had expected to see his brighten with pleasure at the announcement of how Mabel had used her privilege she was mistaken. Before she knew what was happening he had seized her wrist and dragged the muff away from her face.

"Helen, you don't think I care for" —

She struggled to free herself and he let go.

"Helen — Helen" —

The little old man in the corner coughed. He was looking on in amazement. She was hurrying from the room, down the stairs, which were full of people. She thought it was terror. It was the terror of sudden joy.

He caught her on the sidewalk. "Helen — Miss Gaunt" —

"You had no right," she half sobbed, "please go" —

"I will, when you have forgiven me."

"Yes, I forgive you — but I hate you."

He stood still. She felt as if she had struck him a blow, and hurried on. She did not stop till she was within sight of the door, and when, breath-

less, as if still pursued, she took her latch-key from her pocket, she was hating herself more than him. The dream had come true, but she had not done what she expected to do when it came. She had played with fire, and it had scorched her. Yet she was glad, glad, glad.

XI

As was expected, the Bishop came to dinner. Mabel and Helen were in evening dress. They were going to the Wendells'. Both were looking exceptionally lovely.

On her return from the Academy Helen had gone directly to her room, and had had an hour to think before Mabel opened her door to ask her what dress she was going to wear. Her mind was a tumult of conflicting thoughts. She had no sufficient reason to offer for not going to the Wendells'. She could invent no excuse which Mabel, who was bent upon going, would accept. She both dreaded and longed to go; dreaded to, because she did not wish her next meeting with Mr. Heald to take place in a crowded room where the inevitable explanations would have to be suppressed,—she was in no mood for conventional talk; dreaded to, because feeling might break through the barriers under Mabel's observing eyes. But her longing was stronger than her dread. It was invincible, and she knew it to be so the while she argued. Fate was waiting for her, her own fate, and she could not keep away. For the first time in her

orderly life she was excited and reckless. With a whole hour to think she had not been able to think at all, every reason conjured up by her old-fashioned ideas of propriety, by her natural timidity, by her fear of taking a false step, disappearing before the undercurrent of her desire. Her meeting with Mr. Heald had been far more decisive than she had expected, and after the first shock was over there came an ecstasy of exhilaration. She had made an overwhelming discovery. He did not care for Mabel. There was a corollary to this proposition which she hardly dared yet to put into words — he loved *her*, Helen.

The Bishop reflected during dinner on the Providence which in taking the wife had left this charming daughter to brighten a lonely fireside and had given this daughter so charming a friend and companion. He remarked to Jack, after the children as he termed them were gone, on the blessing of children in general. Jack said Mabel was a good girl; he had at times felt the responsibility of guiding one who had no mother; he would have known better how to manage a son, but he was satisfied. For he had observed that there were three dangerous periods in a business man's career: when he began and knew nothing, a little later when he thought he knew everything, and when his sons came of age. He had at all events escaped the last.

The Bishop laughed over his wine at Jack's escape from disaster, and then they adjourned to the library, where plans and elevations were spread upon the table. Jack gave a polite attention to these details, but made no comment, not being as he said an expert in church architecture, and asked bluntly what the estimates called for.

The Bishop coughed and replied that he was gratified to be able to say that the necessary amount had been already subscribed, but that at the suggestion of Professor Fisher, a most excellent, sagacious man, it was proposed, in order to promote a closer connection between the church and the college, to establish a fund to be known as the Church Aid Foundation, to assist such worthy young men as were intending to enter the ministry; and that, as the money required for the church had been already provided, he wished to suggest that whatever amount Mr. Temple had felt disposed to contribute should be applied in this manner. He also explained that he had had some general conversation with Mrs. Kensett on the subject, and that he thought a word from her business manager and adviser would probably lead to good results.

"No," said Jack decisively, "I can't do that. I make it a rule in the management of other people's property never to advise them how to give it away. My business is to care for it and increase it, if I can."

"I can quite understand that," replied the Bishop. On the other hand, it was quite possible that Mrs. Kensett might ask his advice.

"That's another thing," said Jack. "I shall send you a check to-morrow for five thousand dollars, provided you can apply it to the church, and can divert an equal amount from what has been subscribed for that object to the Aid Fund. I am not in sympathy with wholesale aid of that kind on organized lines. Why not help the doctors or the lawyers? When I find a good man who needs assistance I am willing to give him a lift" —

"That is precisely" — began the Bishop.

"But I take his note," continued Jack, "and make him pay it. Make education as good, as cheap, and as universal as possible, but don't encourage a man to expect to get it for nothing. If you do, he will expect to get his living for nothing."

The Bishop listened attentively.

"Help individuals, not classes," Jack went on. "I don't know why ministers should be coddled. You are suffering to-day from a system which has landed men in the pulpit who could n't earn their salt in any other profession. The men you can bait with free tuition and half-price rates are not the men you want."

The Bishop admitted it was very difficult to administer aid intelligently. He came back to the

point, however, by remarking that he thought there would be no difficulty in obtaining the consent of some of the donors to a transfer of their gifts from the church to the Aid Fund.

"There is Mr. Heald, for example, who has given one thousand dollars, and who would doubtless have no objection."

"Mr. Heald?" said Jack. "I did n't know he was fish for your net, Bishop."

The Bishop felt called upon to explain. It was an excellent sign, he said, when the successful young men of the country showed so substantially their appreciation of the serious needs of the community and their own obligations to society.

Jack did not argue the question. He was willing to meet Mr. Heald in his own way and at his own time, but it irritated him thus to keep running up against a man of whose existence he had barely heard a week ago. He recognized, too, his duty to help the world along and up so far as he could, but he was glad that was not his sole business, as it was the Bishop's. "I should have to wink at too many things," he thought while the Bishop was explaining Mr. Heald's contribution, "or else kick the whole kettle of fish over."

After the Bishop had gone he picked up a book and settled himself to read. He was glad Mabel was having a good time. He was pleased that Mrs. Kensett should have been so kind to her. How

good she was! His book was the personal narrative of a war correspondent with the English in Africa. Paul had sent it to him with his own marginal comments. He had been reading some time before he discovered he had not taken in a single word. He threw away his second cigar with the idea that he was smoking too much, and began again at the first page. It did not hold him long, for he soon found himself asking how old he was — he was born in '48, — two, and fifty, and two — that made fifty-four, — not too much time to lose, — to wait. He closed the book, and as he laid it on the mantel noticed that his temples were tinged with gray. Then he decided to look in at the Wendells' and bring Mabel home.

The Wendell house was built around three sides of an open court separated from the street by an iron grille. A long line of carriages extended on either side of the gateway when Mabel and Helen arrived. A half-hundred people on the sidewalk without braved the cold to catch a fleeting glimpse of the toilettes as the carriage doors were opened under the porte-cochère. Above shone the brilliantly lighted windows of the ball-room, whence came the sound of music and the hum of voices to mingle with the rattle of wheels over the pavement and the shouts of policemen regulating the circulation.

The pillared hall was a garden of palms and flowering shrubs, and a continuous stream of guests from the dressing-rooms was ascending the broad stairway between garlands of smilax and roses wreathed along the white balustrades.

The dancing was in full swing, and Mabel had hardly exchanged a word with her hostess in the reception-room at the head of the stairs before she was claimed by her partner for the waltz just begun.

Contrary to her usual habit, Helen accepted every partner who offered himself. Dancing had not occupied a prominent place in her academic training, and when she first began to go out with Mabel she had sacrificed the appetite which comes with eating to what she thought the inferiority of her social position demanded. But all this austerity and shyness had long since retired with the elliptic functions into the background. To-night, movement was a necessity to her. The fever of the dance matched her own. The partner for whom her eyes swept the room in the whirl of the waltz had not come, but not for an instant did the certainty of her expectation fail. He had said he was to be there.

The surprise of the evening was a minuet in costume and masks at midnight. At a quarter to twelve the music ceased. The size of the room limited the number of couples in the minuet, and

the fortunate ones, selected by lottery, retired to the dressing-rooms. At twelve o'clock the card parties in the smoking-room had broken up, and those whom fortune had not favored filled the doors and lined the sides of the ball-room as spectators. Then, to the music of a march, the dancers entered, advancing from opposite doors, the ladies in pink, the gentlemen in black dominos. Each lady carried a black fan with ribbons to match the bow on the black domino of her partner. No one was to know who his partner was till the minuet was over, when all were to unmask and go in to supper.

A few moments of confusion and subdued laughter followed the entrance, while the black dominos were searching for the fan whose colors corresponded with their own. Then the stately music of the minuet began. Helen recognized it at once. It was the minuet of the first act of *Hoffmann's Tales*. Should the automaton speak or keep silence?

Her partner had bowed to her, but had not spoken. For the first few measures not a word was uttered; then the voice for which she had been waiting said, —

“Is it New York, or Rome?”

“Rome,” she whispered.

It was not possible to converse, only to exchange a word now and then, to answer a question after an interval of separation and waiting.

The mystery and protection of her mask gave her assurance. She had looked forward to possibly a few hurried words of explanation ; an awkward meeting under observing eyes, or, worse still, a forced and embarrassing silence. She had felt that whatever the result of her first meeting with Mr. Heald might be, that first meeting must be a shock, a pain, a moment when things would be said which were not meant, or perhaps more would be meant than could be said. Her mask and domino were both a shield and a weapon. They hid the beating of hearts and the eloquence of eyes. She could be as near or as far as she pleased.

“And everything is forgiven?”

“Forgiven — not forgotten.”

A murmur of approval greeted the termination of the first movement.

“And the hate is gone?”

“No.”

“That is unjust” —

Then the music recommenced.

“How does your bow happen to match my fan?”

“Which is stronger, hate or curiosity?”

“Curiosity, — now.”

“I bribed a tiring-maiden. Am I forgiven that, too?”

The movement of the dance separated them. Then she was beside him again.

“You are in constant need of absolution.”

“I am content with my confessor.”

Another pause. Then —

“Yes, I will forgive you — on one condition — in a moment we shall unmask” —

“Yes.”

“Promise me” —

“Everything.”

“To forget, as I have forgiven, that we” — her voice trembled and softened over the pronoun — “were ever in Rome.”

“I cannot. One can promise to forgive, not to forget. It is not in our power. You have just said so yourself.”

“Till I remind you of it, then.”

There was a silence.

“Quick! we are almost through — it is my first request.”

“Yes, I promise.”

The music ceased, the doors of the supper-room were thrown open, and there were exclamations of surprise and ripples of laughter.

“You!” he exclaimed, as the masks fell. “I did not dream.”

“Nor I,” she said, slipping her hand through his arm. It held her fan, and he took it from her.

“How pretty! May I keep it?”

“Why do you want it?” she asked, forcing herself to speak indifferently.

“It will be my — my passport to Rome.”

“I did not know you were going abroad.”

“I did not know you were such a coquette.”

Then their eyes met, they both laughed, and went in with the throng to supper.

It was served at small tables and there was no further opportunity for confidences or mystery. The cotillion began immediately after, and Helen was claimed by her partner. Of Mr. Heald she saw no more. She was almost glad, although she was constantly looking for him. She was excited and talked at random. Nothing seemed worth talking about any more. She wanted to go home, to be alone, to think, and was relieved when Mabel signified her readiness to leave.

In the carriage Mabel's high spirits jarred upon her. Her gayety seemed forced and frivolous. In the awakening of her own heart, and the sudden concentration of its feeling into a single channel, life had become serious as well as beautiful, and Mabel's frivolity grew to such proportions that she almost despised her. As the carriage rolled on, after Jack had asked a few questions, Mabel lapsed into silence, — a silence which in Helen's nervous and excited state seemed ominous. She essayed a beginning of conversation, but Mabel replied in monosyllables. Occupied with her own happiness, she had forgotten Mabel entirely; now, the old thought that Mabel had cared for Mr. Heald came back again. She tried to remember why she had

ever thought so. Mabel cared generally so much more for herself than for any one else, her moods were so contradictory and her remarks so often inconsequential and purposeless, that she really did not know why she had ever imagined such a thing. But with the silence had come a complete revulsion of feeling. Did Mr. Heald really care for *her*, Helen? Amid the lights, the flowers, and the music, the banter in which they had indulged had been delicious to her. In the gloom of the carriage rattling over the stones it seemed unsubstantial. To him it might be all banter. She possessed nothing, she was nobody. Why *should* he love her? She had asked the question before, once almost indifferently, as she might have asked a question affecting some third person. Now it made her heart beat with a dull pain. She was glad when the carriage stopped, glad when Mr. Temple had said good-night, glad when Mabel's door was shut. They usually had to talk such evenings over. To-night, when she pleaded fatigue and a headache, Mabel advised her to go to bed at once. She undressed quickly, and then, lying in the darkness and stillness, she went over every incident, repeated every sentence. And it was not the light words exchanged in the ball-room, when she was so happy, which were dearest, but that moment of surprise and anger when he had torn her hand from her face, and looked into her eyes with all for which she hungered in his own.

XII

A SUCCESSION of dull, stormy days had necessitated the postponement of the plans for a morning with the grouse. Then, too, Dolly had unexpectedly decided to go to New York for a day on matters incident to her projected house party. There were various orders to be given for supplies not to be found in Westford's Doric Emporium, — supplies which required Dolly's personal selection and supervision. And Margaret was going with her.

Mabel's note of acceptance had been received and the invitations had been issued.

"It seems you were right," Paul said, as he read Mabel's opening sentence. "At any rate she is no coward. And Heald, too!" reading on, — "well, I *should* like to meet *him*."

The evening before they started a letter came from Jack which read as follows : —

DEAR PAUL, — Argonaut is quoted to-day at 45. Two thousand shares at 45 means \$90,000. Deducting cost, one thousand shares at 25 and one thousand at 40, net profit, less commissions, \$25,000.

If Mrs. Kensett's chief concern is for her friend, she can turn over to said friend this profit, together with the \$40,000 cost of original investment, and get her own \$25,000 back whole.

A good four per cent bond can be had at about par, and four per cent on \$65,000 is \$2600. This would put her friend on a safe basis with an income of \$2600, instead of \$1400 as before the exchange of the three and one half per cent bonds for Argonaut.

I have as yet no information about the latter, but I should advise sale as above. Wire me if sale is decided, and send certificates by early mail for delivery.

Yours,

JOHN TEMPLE.

Paul took the letter at once to Dolly.

"You ought to be thankful to get out of it as well as that. Certainly Miss Frazer cannot complain."

Dolly thought wistfully of the prediction that the shares would go to one hundred and fifty, but her ambition to make money for Margaret had received a chill. She agreed without a word. The certificates were in the silver safe in the dining-room. She would go and explain it all to Margaret at once.

"It is n't necessary to tell her all the profits are not hers, is it, Paul?"

"A little while ago you were going to tell her all the losses were yours," said Paul, laughing. "You must settle that with your own conscience. Have Miss Frazer assign her stock to Jack. You can take it down with you."

"No," said Dolly, "I do not want to meet Mr. Temple — yet. We can send it by registered mail."

"If Mrs. Frazer would n't mind being alone for a day or two I would go down with you."

"Do, do!" cried Dolly. "I had thought of it myself, but I did not suggest it for the same reason. After all, it will be for only two nights and a day. I will go and ask her."

On inquiry Mrs. Frazer declared she would like nothing better than to be alone. She would call it a rainy day and catch up with her correspondence. So Paul wired Jack to sell, and the Waldorf for rooms.

They reached New York the evening of the Wendells' ball. The following day Mrs. Kensett and Margaret were to be occupied with their purchases, and it was agreed that they should lunch out and all meet for dinner. Paul rose early. He had nothing in particular to do, but he wished to deliver the certificates at once and get them off his mind and hands. There were but two persons in the breakfast-room, and he found a vacant table at one of the Avenue windows. While eating his

breakfast he became absorbed in the morning paper. There were rumors of peace negotiations which, if confirmed, would necessitate his return to London and South Africa.

On leaving the table after finishing his breakfast he overheard a gentleman inquiring at the desk for Mrs. Kensett. The clerk informed him that Mrs. Kensett had not yet come down, whereupon he left a letter, asking that it be sent to her room at once. The stranger's face struck Paul as one he had seen somewhere before, where he could not remember, but the incident made no particular impression upon him, and without thinking any more of it he started down town for Jack's office.

The gentleman was Mr. Heald. He had left the Wendells' that morning at one o'clock, immediately after supper, and had gone directly to his bachelor apartment at the Carleton. There were two letters on his writing-table, one bearing an Arizona postmark, the other that of Westford.

He opened the former, reading it through slowly and holding it afterwards a long time in his hand, plunged in thought. At last, laying it down with a shrug of the shoulders, he took up the second letter, — Dolly's note of invitation to Cedar Hill. To this he wrote at once a brief reply as follows :

MY DEAR MRS. KENSETT, — I have just received your invitation to come to Cedar Hill on the

twenty-third instant, — an invitation which I accept with the greatest pleasure. It is most kind of you to include me among your friends, and I appreciate deeply the honor you do me. I have not had the pleasure of seeing you since we met at Lenox, and before I had read your note this morning I had intended to write you and to advise you, in the same spirit in which a year ago I suggested the purchase of the Argonaut shares, to sell them *without delay*. I shall ask you to treat this letter as confidential, and I shall, on seeing you, explain the reasons for this advice, as also for my not giving them here in detail.

With renewed thanks for your kind invitation,

I am, most sincerely yours,

REGINALD HEALD.

Then he sealed the letter, directed it, and went to bed, leaving orders to be called at seven.

At seven o'clock his man brought him his mail and coffee. In a morning paper he saw among the hotel arrivals the name of Mrs. Kensett at the Waldorf. He dressed with his usual care, put the letter to Mrs. Kensett in his pocket, and walked over to the hotel. Mrs. Kensett's name was on the register, but the ladies, he was told, had not yet breakfasted. He hesitated a moment, finally decided not to wait, changed the address of the letter, asking that it be sent up to Mrs. Kensett's room, and left immediately.

Paul found Jack at the office, though it was barely nine o'clock when he sent in his card.

"Holloa!" said Jack, "I did n't expect to see you."

Paul explained that he had had no idea of coming until he had received Jack's letter. The statement was not literally exact, for while Jack's letter had had its influence, the idea of accompanying Dolly had been conceived when he found Margaret was going with her. He did not, however, say anything to Jack about Dolly's being in New York.

"I brought down the stock," he said, taking it from his inside pocket. "I suppose it is sold. You got my telegram?"

"Yes. As I wrote you, I had no reasons except prudential ones. I sent a man out to Arizona to investigate" —

"You did?" exclaimed Paul.

—"but when I saw the stock at forty-five I thought it better not to wait. You see, I am rather bound to look pretty carefully after Mrs. Kensett." He smiled as he spoke and looked out of the window.

"Quite right. Dolly was a little fool."

"We all do foolish things once in a while," said Jack.

"It is n't every one learns his lesson on a rising market, though," Paul replied. "What do you suppose possessed the man?"

"Who, Heald? I don't know. One is naturally suspicious of men who advise women to put money in such things. But it may be all right. What are you doing to-day?"

"Nothing, till dinner. I have an engagement for this evening, and shall go back to-morrow unless there is something in this peace news. What do you think of it?"

"I don't believe a word of it. London does n't either. The market always gets the first news."

"Nor I," said Paul. "Besides, I should have a cable if there was anything in it. But you are busy, and I won't bother you."

"Will you lunch with me?" asked Jack, as Paul turned to go.

"Of course I will."

"Well, to-day is Saturday and I lunch at home. I would rather like to have you meet Mabel."

"Certainly, I should like to."

"At one o'clock, then. I will telephone her you are coming. Good-by."

When Paul was shown into the reception-room at Gramercy Park a young girl came forward to meet him who reminded him instantly of Gladys, or rather of what Gladys might have been at her age.

"This is Mr. Graham? I am Mabel. Papa has not come home yet. I believe he is never late at business appointments, but I cannot say as much

for him at home. This is my friend, Miss Gaunt. Mr. Graham, Helen."

There was something very winning and gracious in Mabel's manner, and Paul thought she was not so bad as she painted herself.

"I suppose people talk to you about South Africa," she went on, "till you are tired of the very sound of the name. I resolved, when papa told me you were coming, not to say a word about it."

"It is n't a place many people are interested in, Miss Temple, aside from the war."

"Oh, but I am interested in it," cried Mabel, "only it sounds much the same as Patagonia, or Kamchatka. I don't think I should like to live there. I don't care for places which only have futures. I like best those that have a present. You can't live on a future, can you?"

"Only those who have no satisfactory present need try to," replied Paul. "I live a lot in the future."

"Certainly. In one sense we all do. But you do not appear so very discontented."

Helen, sitting in the window seat with her embroidery, smiled. Until she went to the Academy and found her new world she had always been very matter of fact, and it amused her now to see how quickly Mabel touched the personal note of conversation.

"No, I am not," said Paul, "and I would not

tell you so if I were. I am not fond of people who trail their personal grievances before the world."

"Are n't they detestable!" assented Mabel. "And yet," she added, smiling at him with her violet eyes, "I hope you are not perfectly satisfied. I shall not like you if you are."

Paul was determined not to like Mabel, and cared little whether she liked him or not. But like most men in whom women show an interest, her interest in him interested him in her. She changed the subject, however, immediately.

"You are staying at Cedar Hill, are you not, Mr. Graham? It is such a lovely spot, and Mrs. Kensett is such a lovely woman."

"Do you think so?" said Paul, looking at her.

"Indeed I do. Everybody does. There is no minority of opinion on that subject. You need not feel obliged to feign surprise just because you are her cousin," she said, laughing back into his eyes; "or don't you agree with me?"

"Certainly I do. Dolly is one of the dearest women in the world. But not every one shows his liking in the same way."

Helen held her breath. She was sure Paul knew. But Mabel was smiling.

"I show mine by going to Cedar Hill next week. Did you know that?" she said, fastening a rosebud from the flowers on the table in her corsage.

"Yes. Mrs. Kensett told me."

"Helen dear, will you please see if that is papa? Of course, she naturally would," she resumed carelessly, after Helen had gone. The smile had faded from her face, and a light came into her eyes. "Does she tell you everything?"

"No, indeed," said Paul, resolving to keep away from dangerous ground; "we have a lot of secrets we do not tell."

"Have you? How *do* you manage to keep them? It's so hard to keep a secret if it's worth telling."

Paul was thinking it was very hard to keep one's friends if one did not conceal one's resentments, when Miss Gaunt came in with a telegram.

"It's from papa," said Mabel, tearing open the envelope and reading aloud: "'Sorry. Detained. Don't wait.' How provoking!" she exclaimed. "But you will not lose your luncheon, Mr. Graham; that is the most important thing, is n't it? And we shall not lunch alone, Helen, which is more important still. Every one thinks himself the only one who asks for papa's time and money," — she led the way into the dining-room, — "the result is, poor papa will have little of either left. There ought to be a society for the protection of — will you take this seat, Mr. Graham — of papas like mine."

"Would n't you be the first to come under its operation?" asked Paul.

"Oh, but I don't count. Papa belongs to me, and I am his diversion."

"Yes, but by and by, when you do as all young ladies do — what then?"

"You mean when I marry?" said Mabel, with a disdainful shrug of her pretty shoulders. "You talk like the Bishop, and you are not old enough for that — or does life in South Africa make one preternaturally old and serious?"

"I don't need to be a bishop to make a prediction of that kind. I was only generalizing in the mildest and safest manner possible."

Mabel laughed. "That is just what the Bishop is always doing. He's a dear good soul. He never singles you out, or makes you feel worse than other people. Do you know him, — Bishop Stearns, I mean?"

"He was at Cedar Hill last week."

"And Mrs. Frazer is there, too, is n't she? I have always wanted to meet her. Is n't she very eccentric? She has such a wonderful name — Laurinda! It sounds like a sword flashing from its scabbard — *en garde!*"

Paul was amused and fell in with her mood. "You will have the opportunity of exchanging opinions and crossing swords with her soon. I heard her say you were a spoiled child."

"Did she? Really! How interesting. Then you were forewarned. What do you think now?"

“ Oh, my opinion is n’t worth anything. I can’t give it on hearsay evidence.”

“ Well ” — her expressive face became earnest — “ you will have the occasion to observe me at Cedar Hill next week. I challenge you to tell me what you think then.” She was leaning forward with one elbow on the table, a half-serious, half-provoking light behind her lashes. “ Ah, now you are beating a retreat. Please don’t. It will be so interesting. Papa is such a poor judge, and Helen — she never says what she really thinks of me.”

“ Why, Mabel,” protested Helen.

“ Will you, will you ? ” she persisted, heedless of Helen’s protest ; “ not a polite, commonplace opinion, like the Bishop’s sermons, but a real, sober, serious ” —

“ I warn you I shall be terribly blunt and outspoken.”

“ Of course, otherwise it will be good for nothing. Then it’s agreed. The night before I leave Cedar Hill I shall hold you to your promise. And for once,” she said, drawing herself up triumphantly, “ we shall have the truth, the sweet, naked truth. I can bear anything, — you will have found that out in making up your opinion.”

“ Mabel,” said Helen, after Paul had gone, “ I wish you would let me speak to you without being offended.”

They were in Mabel's room upstairs, and Mabel was pinning on her hat before the mirror. She turned, with her hands still adjusting her hat, looking at Helen with an expression of benevolent curiosity. Helen was bending over her embroidery.

"Well, I am waiting."

Helen looked up with a reassuring smile, as if she were propitiating an idol.

"I don't mean to say anything that would hurt you in any way" —

"Say it, say it, Helen. Don't keep me in suspense so. When you have anything horrid to say you always begin in that way."

"I don't wish to say anything horrid," protested Helen.

"Helen, you are as transparent as glass. Don't you suppose I know when you disapprove of me? You were scolding me all through luncheon while I was talking to Mr. Graham."

"No, I was not," said Helen, asserting herself. "But I was thinking you were doing yourself an injustice. I don't like to see you do that. It sometimes seems as if you were determined to prevent any one from — from" —

"From what?"

"From being your friend."

"In other words, I am unnatural, insincere, repellent" —

"Mabel!" broke in Helen pleadingly. "Be

just. Did I say that? Isn't it just because you are none of these things that I dislike to see you appear" —

"Then I do appear so, do I?"

"Don't question me so, Mabel. You put words into my mouth. I was simply saying that you sometimes assume a manner, a way of speaking, that wrongs you in the eyes of those who do not know you as I do."

"Are you sure you know me?"

Leaning back in her chair, Helen looked up into Mabel's face. "I thought I did," she began, trying to smile and struggling with the beginning of tears. But the coldness in Mabel's eyes changed her to stone. "I am sorry I spoke," she said. "I was not trying to be profound. Perhaps neither of us knows the other. We certainly do not understand each other now." It was on her lips to say: it makes a difference who tells you the truth, — but she restrained herself.

Mabel was drawing on her gloves. She was conscious of the sudden revulsion in Helen's feelings, and her own softened. She often see-sawed with Helen in this way.

She stooped quickly to Helen's hair and kissed it. "Forgive me, but don't scold me. I am made as I am. If I am ever to change it will be by" — she paused and laughed — "by something great, a crisis, a catastrophe, something volcanic — which

is not likely." Helen went on with her embroidery in silence. "Are n't you going to forgive me?" The continued silence reversed the current of her feeling again. "This is play. We may have something *real* to forgive some day." She moved toward the door, buttoning her gloves. "Tell papa we entertained Mr. Graham as well as we could." She was at the door now. "And Helen, Helen — look at me — love me a little, will you?"

Helen started forward, disarmed. But the door had closed and Mabel was gone.

XIII

PAUL had left immediately after luncheon on the plea of important business. It did not appear to be very pressing, or to require his presence in any particular place, for he wandered in an aimless fashion out of the quiet of Gramercy Park into the roar of Broadway and up Fifth Avenue, looking into the shop windows with the eager but vacillating gaze of a Christmas shopper searching for he knows not what. Yet it was a very important business he had in hand. He wanted to give something to Margaret.

The idea had come to him that morning; it had haunted him all day, and could not be dislodged. He had said to himself twenty times that if he had a reason for giving Miss Frazer anything it was not one he could adduce. A gift to her could not mean what an ordinary gift means, and certainly the reason for such a gift did not exist; their acquaintance was too short for that. But he did not reason this out. It was *not* an ordinary gift. The only question was to find something she could accept. It was not a gift at all, but only a way of telling her what was not yet to be told in words.

The streets were filled with holiday throngs bent on similar errands, and windows glittered with every temptation. He elbowed his way through the crowds, conscious all the while that what he was seeking was not to be found in any shop window. It must be something personal, — personal to him, — and then he stopped on the curbing, lost in thought. A woman can give an old glove, a flower, but a man has nothing. There was a florist's across the street, and he went over. The window was a garden in miniature, — flowering shrubs in rare old china pots, clusters of roses tied with broad ribbons, orchids of strange shapes, and bunches of violets of royal size. No, that would n't do. It was all too rich, almost vulgar, as bad as diamonds. A wild flower from the hillside slope above Cedar Hill, that could lie between the leaves of a cherished book, was infinitely better. Yet he could not rid himself entirely of the idea of value. Nothing was too good for *her*. Did the whole world contain nothing which held what a woman gives with a worn glove or a faded flower?

And then he turned down the Avenue again, suddenly, with a quick, decided step, walking straight for the porch of the Fifth Avenue Hotel. He had taken a room there the night of his arrival, and had left in storage certain trunks and boxes for which he had no immediate use. From one of these he took a small package, and the important business was done.

It was five o'clock when he reached the Waldorf. Dolly had said they might be back for tea, but he was told by the elevator boy that the ladies had not yet come in. He went to his room, locked his door, and opened the package. It contained an oblong black box of teak-wood, dug out in rough uncouth fashion, like a log canoe. Within, wrapped in a yellow cloth, of coarse fibre but soft as silk, lay a long neck-chain of blood-red carnelians, curiously cut in varying shapes, and separated by gold beads cut through in patterns intricate and delicate as lace.

He had bought it in Ceylon years ago — for nobody. That was the satisfying thought. On leaving for home he had put it in his trunk with a vague idea of giving it to Dolly, but that idea did not recur to trouble him now. What pleased him now was that it was a personal possession, and that he had not bought it for Margaret, but for Somebody — not Dolly either — who was found. He still had some doubts whether she would accept it, whether she would not think it too much, and to overcome as far as possible this objection he took out his card and wrote on the back: —

“Remember, the value of a friend's gift lies in the giving.”

This done, he wrapped the chain carefully in its yellow cloth, laid it with the card in the teak-wood box, dressed for dinner, and began the long process of waiting. Christmas, which was only a few days

off, had first presented itself as an excuse, but had been abandoned. Christmas had nothing to do with it.

It was only six o'clock. There were two whole hours yet before dinner, and time hung heavily on his hands. And then he was aware of his restlessness and impatience, and an old-time resolve came to him that if ever he loved a woman he would love her straightforwardly, honestly, manfully, without any nonsense ; and he determined to banish Margaret from his mind and go down to the reading-room to see what the evening papers had to say about the peace rumors.

At a quarter to eight he had exhausted the evening news and was dividing the time between watching the clock and the people going in and out from the restaurant. He was beginning to grow cross over Dolly's unconscionable delay when a hall-boy asked him if he was No. 33, and, on receiving an affirmative answer, announced that dinner was served in No. 20.

No. 20 was a pleasant parlor with very little of the hotel about it. Shaded candles were burning on the dinner-table as Paul entered, and numberless feminine belongings scattered about the room gave it a homelike appearance.

"We were both tired," Dolly said, "and thought we would dine here, unless you are anxious to dine downstairs."

"You have n't tired yourselves out, I hope," said Paul, looking at Dolly but speaking to Margaret.

"Oh no," replied Dolly, "we have taken it very leisurely. When you know just what you want and just where to get it, it's very easy."

Paul, remembering his recent shopping experience, thought the converse of the proposition equally true.

And then with all a woman's love for dainty things and joy in their possession, amid innumerable excursions from the table in search of proofs and exhibits, Dolly told the story of the day.

"You can smoke here, Paul," she said, as the table was cleared away, "and, by the way, I want to show you a letter I received this morning."

She disappeared for a moment and then came in with Mr. Heald's note in her hand.

"I absolutely forgot," she said apologetically, "it is marked confidential. I saw it at the time, and then it passed entirely out of my head. It was very stupid of me. I shall tell you all about it some day."

Feeling that she was not concerned in the conversation, Margaret had drawn her chair up to the fire and was cutting the leaves of a magazine.

"But I must answer it at once. You don't mind, do you? My writing materials are in my room. It will take me only a minute."

Margaret was still sitting before the fire. Her back was turned toward Paul, her head, bent forward over her book, outlined against the background of firelight. He saw the wisps of brown hair that could not be confined, from which he had brushed the snow and frozen sleet, — he had touched them once! — and there rose from his heart the certain knowledge that he wanted her, just wanted her, without any afterthought or forethought of what that meant. Whenever he had thought of marriage before, the subject had involved all sorts of prudential considerations. Could he afford it? Would it interfere with his work? What woman would accept his life in South Africa! Not one of these things occurred to him now. But something else did, something that had never crossed his mind before, — that he would be content to stand outside this woman's door for all time if that was the condition she would impose. He did not stop to reflect that no woman had ever imposed such a condition, or could. His feeling was only the inseparable part of that reverence which is the dawn of all true human love.

The scratching of Dolly's pen came from the adjoining room. He took the parcel from his pocket and went softly forward.

"Miss Frazer." She turned, startled by his voice. "Long ago, before I knew you existed, I went shopping too, in Ceylon, for an unknown

Somebody" — he put the black box in her hand — "I want you to keep this — will you?" — her eyes turned from his to the strange-shaped box and back again to his in evident surprise — "Don't say no."

"For me?" she said, a little confused; "must I look at it?"

"I suppose you must."

She lifted the lid with trembling fingers, looked up again with a shy, wondering smile, and then back to the yellow wrapping, unfolding it slowly. She glanced at the chain, — a woman's glance that takes in everything, — then read the card.

"O Mr. Graham!" She did not look up, and the chain had fallen into her lap, but she held the card in her closed hand.

"And we shall have our day with the grouse — before the crowd comes?"

"Yes," she whispered, "if you wish it."

"There!" cried Dolly, coming in with her letter, "now we can have a quiet talk. What have you done with your day, Paul?" She drew her chair up beside Margaret's, whose magazine lay in her lap, performing its new duty of guard and shield. But nothing of all that was talked over that evening had much interest for Paul, — a fact quite evident to Dolly, who began to feel sure that some day she could tell him she really had not

written any letter at all, and that he would agree with her that it was quite right not to do certain things if people did not know you were not doing them.

XIV

FROM Dolly's point of view the day with the grouse had proved a great success; that is to say, they had had a most delicious lunch before a blazing log fire in the sugar camp, and no one had been hurt. Driving out with Mrs. Frazer to meet the hunters, she had asked her whether Paul was not becoming interested in Margaret, and had been disconcerted by the reply that Margaret had been sounded on that subject and had pronounced the idea ridiculous. She had received a second check when Margaret came down to dinner that evening wearing a wonderful chain of unusual and exquisite workmanship, which Dolly was imprudent enough to declare she had never seen before. "Where were your eyes?" Margaret had said; and the quiet indifference of this answer had so effectually closed all the avenues of further inquiry that Dolly was almost persuaded she had seen it a hundred times.

The dogs had proved worthless, not having been shot over since Cecil's death, and having meanwhile been spoiled by feminine society. They were wild beyond control, and vanished entirely after

flushing the first bird, to reappear only at night with bleeding feet, fagged out with their all-day's run after rabbits in the swamps and ravines beyond what Mr. Pearson called the "mount'n."

Margaret had no appropriate costume except such as she had improvised, — a pair of Cecil's brown leggings over high moccasin shoes, a short blue skirt and jacket with white flannel blouse, and a blue veil knotted under a soft hat to keep her hair from the spikes and twigs of the thickets. Dolly thought she had never seen her look so beautiful, and was still more of this opinion when Margaret came into the glow of the leaping fire, flushed with her tramp in the bracing air, — being so impressed that she could not resist kissing her and saying under her breath, "You dear, you are just lovely."

Unable to beat off temptation, Mr. Pearson had "guessed he'd come along o' Jim." Between them they knew every bit of cover on the hillside and had hunted out a half-dozen stray birds, of which Paul had got three and Margaret two, — good results for a half day in late December. In default of the dogs' aid, thrown on their own resources, they had been absorbed in their work. Oh, that breathless listening, waiting, watching, in the wood twilight, when one's heartbeat is the only sound, — what is there like it!

"Can you whistle?" Paul had asked when they started.

Margaret laughed. "I can try."

"We may be out of sight of each other, you know." And he had listened for that low call of hers through the woods more than for the whirl of beating wings.

When her maid knocked that morning at her door an hour earlier than usual Margaret knew by that token that the day was fair, that the day he had asked for, the day she had given, was come. Not for a moment had she doubted that it would, and when the shutters were thrown open, and the bright sun streamed in, it was no surprise. How wonderful that such a day could be! like other days for all the rest of the world, yet created apart for her. She dressed herself as in a dream. Not that all was not real and sure, but too sweet and strange for anything but dreams. Her heart worked like her mind, straight and true, with the rectitude and certainty of nature. Love had risen in it as the sun in the sky, and there was no more night. Yet not since the chain had fallen from her hands into her lap in the parlor of the Waldorf, and she had covered it from sight at Dolly's approach, had she looked at it again. She had hurried it into its black box without a glance and hidden it away. For she had taken it as it had been given, not as a gift, but as a message, a summons, and she could not see it without seeing all she had given in return. The sun was warm and, gladdening, it was

sweet to stand in its light and feel its strength, but she could not look into its face yet. As she dressed she heard the dogs barking in the yard, and Jim was talking to Paul. He "reckoned the day was just made on purpose, — the birds would be on the edges in the sun, sartin." And then at the last moment, after breakfast had been announced and her maid had gone, she went to the closet, took the black box from its dark corner under the contents of her secretest drawer, and unfastening her white flannel waist clasped the chain hurriedly about her neck.

All through breakfast while Dolly was enlarging upon the importance of meeting promptly at noon, explaining that luncheon would be ready at that hour, and cautioning her to be careful of her gun, she was living in another world, going to another rendezvous. All through the morning Jim's presence at her elbow threw no doubt upon the issue of the day; and when the luncheon-table was cleared away, the horses unblanketed, and Paul asked her if she was too tired to walk home, with a beating heart she said unhesitatingly "No."

Dolly wanted the guns put into the sleigh, but Paul objected; they might get a chance shot on the way home, — that was the reason for walking. Mr. Pearson "guessed there would n't be no more shootin' done unless they went clear over the ridge, and said if he was n't wanted no longer, as he'd

got the chores to do, he'd take a short cut 'cross lots."

"Yer can't miss yer way," he said to Paul. "Jest foller the run down ter the pasture, and then the cart track out ter the road." He watched the pair after the sleigh drove off with Dolly and Mrs. Frazer until they disappeared among the hemlocks, then turning to Jim he said, "Come along, Jim, they ain't goin' to git in no trouble."

No man who is not an egoist, or worse, is ever sure of a woman's love till she has told it with her own lips. Coming up in the train from New York, while Dolly was reading the latest novel, Margaret had told Paul something of her early life and of her memories of her mother. She had been speaking some time before she realized how little her natural reserve counted when talking with him. "I don't know why I should tell you of these things," she said; "I never have, I never could, to any one." "I don't know why you should," he replied, "so far as my being able to help you is concerned. But I should like to." And conscious only of the help that comes from giving dear and long kept memories into trusted hands, she had said, "You do — you do." On leaving the train at the little Westford station, while Dolly was superintending the transfer of numerous packages to the carriage, Margaret had dropped her glove, and he had stooped to pick it up. She had ex-

tended her hand to take it with a word of thanks ready. "No," he had said, "I want to keep it." "Not that old" — "Yes, just that" — And then Dolly came.

And still, walking by her side in the silence and solitude of the December woods, he was not sure. He only knew that he had something of hers, warm with the warmth and sweet with the breath of her body, which said to him, "You do, you do."

"Do you know the people who are coming?"

"Not all. Dolly told me their names. There are several I do not know."

"You know Miss Temple, I suppose."

"Yes, indeed, she has been here before."

"Do you like her?"

"Most people do. She is very pretty."

"But do you?"

"You should not ask me such questions."

"No, you are right. It was an impertinence."

"I did not mean that, but only that when one puts vague feelings into words they sound harsh. I do not like to speak ill of people."

"I am sure you do not."

The drainage of the snow-covered hills had gathered into a little brook which grew larger as they went on.

"We must cross here," said Paul. "Let me have your gun. The stones are slippery."

"No," she replied. "Papa made it a rule when-

ever I went out with him that I must do my share of the work or stay at home."

But he took it from her, carrying it over with his own. "Now come," and he held out his hand.

In a moment they had crossed to the other side, but he did not let go the hand in his. "Margaret" — it was like a new name — "Margaret." She felt herself drawn to him by strong arms, but they did not hurt, and she did not resist. "Margaret — dear" — And then her life and soul went out on her lips to his.

"Don't — dear," she murmured.

"But tell me you do."

She opened her eyes for one moment.

"Yes — I do."

In that homeward walk, when the winter world took on such marvelous hues, and so many common things became precious because they no longer belonged wholly to one's self, it was decided that with the exception of Dolly and Mrs. Frazer no announcement should be made until after Dolly's guests had gone. On returning home they found Dolly had driven over to Lemington with Mrs. Frazer to make calls, and there was no opportunity to see either alone until after dinner was over. Margaret would have spoken when Dolly questioned her about her chain, but the butler was announcing dinner. The moment was not an auspicious one.

Dolly always went up to the nursery after dinner to kiss Dorothy good-night, and after she had gone Mrs. Frazer had the satisfaction of knowing she was right. She refrained from all reference to her previously expressed views on the subject, but smiled so significantly when Margaret made her explanation that words were unnecessary.

"It all seems very strange," Margaret said ; "for when you spoke to me the other day I did not dream of it."

"No, dear, I suppose not. Traps of this sort are very cunningly set, and we generally walk into them blindfolded."

Margaret made no reply. She was not disturbed by this point of view. Her happiness was too real. She hardly knew how the first few steps in her new world had been taken, but she knew they had been willing steps and that she was not blind.

"Have you told Dolly?" asked her mother, as Paul came in with his cigar.

"No, I shall now ;" and she left the room hurriedly to go upstairs.

Through the half-open nursery door she saw Dolly sitting on the edge of Dorothy's bed, and waited till the story which always preceded the last kiss was finished. Then Dolly came forward, her train in one hand, her lighted candle in the other.

"What is it, Margaret?" she said softly, closing the door gently behind her.

Margaret's arm went about her waist. "Come into your room," she whispered; "I have something to tell you."

Of all secrets love is the most difficult to guard, and before Margaret spoke Dolly knew. But with the instinctive feeling that the knowledge of any outside influence would be resented, that to claim any share in bringing about this happiness would mar it, she managed to wear a wonderful mask of surprise.

"Do you remember, Dolly, the first night he came, you said you did not expect me to like him?"

"Did I?" said Dolly innocently, her eyes half full of tears.

"And I said I should not quarrel with any one you loved?"

"Yes, dear, I think I do remember."

There was but one interpretation to put upon Dolly's glistening eyes and subdued enthusiasm. "All her happiness is in the past," thought Margaret; "all mine in the future." That Dolly was glad was unmistakable; but the note was not clear, and its tremor could come only from the memories which another's joy stirs in our own hearts.

"I will come down presently," she said, after they had talked together awhile. But she did not come down, and Mrs. Frazer, with some mumbled words which were not intelligible, left the drawing-room soon after Margaret's return.

She went directly to Dolly's door and knocked. On entering she saw at once that Dolly was embarrassed, like a child who being interrupted in the performance of some mischief pretends to be doing nothing at all. There was no light in the room but a candle, and Dolly was standing in the middle of the floor, holding it in her hand.

"Well?" said Mrs. Frazer, seating herself on the old-fashioned sofa drawn up near the fireplace.

Dolly put the candle down on the dressing-table. "I was just coming down. Dorothy always pulls my hair about so. Were you surprised?" She took up her comb and was smoothing out her hair.

"Dolly." The word was like a call to judgment, and Dolly turned at once. "I have not come to talk to you of Margaret. We both knew all that ages ago."

"You have not come to talk about Margaret?" repeated Dolly, bewildered, her comb in mid-air. And then, as Mrs. Frazer maintained silence, "What have you come to talk about?"

"You. Sit down."

Dolly sat down in a daze, her back to the candle.

"You must n't be so astonished, dear. You were not deceived by Margaret. I am not deceived by you."

"By me?" Dolly repeated again, leaning forward in the eagerness of her surprise, and then

sinking back once more into the shadow. "By me? what do you mean, Laurinda?"

"I mean that I am not stone blind. I am telling you what I told Margaret a few days ago. She was evasive, or obstinate. You are too sensible to be either." Dolly made a gesture. "Don't say you do not understand me. You do — perfectly. If you wish me to go away and say nothing more about it, I will. But if I am to be of any use to you" —

Dolly was silent, staring at the carpet.

"I have known you and John Temple all your lives;" Dolly did not start at the name; she knew it was coming. "I do not know what is the trouble between you, but I know there is some trouble. Will you tell me what it is?"

"There is no trouble," said Dolly faintly.

"Well, if there is none, there will be, and it's too bad. He has had enough trouble in his life. Do you wish me to drop the matter where it is?"

Dolly was recovering her self-control. "I would rather not have spoken of it, but since you have begun" —

"I began because I wished to be of some service to you. You know I am not speaking from curiosity." A deprecatory gesture was the only answer. "Whether you like it or not I saw there was something between you and John, something which was causing you both unhappiness. It is n't money, I

suppose? Of course not. A man may be very self-contained, but he cannot altogether hide his own feelings. He loves you, Dolly."

"Yes, it 's true, but" —

"And you?" persisted Mrs. Frazer.

Dolly made no reply.

"Your silence means only one thing. If you know that he loves you, then he has told you so; and if he has told you so, you must have answered him — what? I cannot understand."

"I answered him no," said Dolly in a low voice that startled her questioner by its energy and finality.

There were a few minutes of silence.

"I can only repeat that I do not comprehend it at all," resumed Mrs. Frazer at length, smoothing out the wrinkles of her dress with her lorgnette. She was not given to caresses, nor was she a person to whom one naturally offered them; but her voice was less abrupt than her words, and the sincerity and kindness of her purpose made themselves felt. "I do not assume to say that you are suited to each other. People have to find that out for themselves. But why, if you love each other, you should not make the trial I cannot imagine. Do you care to tell me?"

"I should not have told you," said Dolly with a resolute effort at steadiness. "Indeed — I did not suppose — we hardly spoke to each other when he

was here — that any one” — She stopped before her voice broke.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Frazer gently, “I have not the least right in the world to intrude upon your privacy. But a third person sometimes sees more clearly than we do. I cannot bear to see you unhappy.”

“There is nothing you can do,” replied Dolly. She had wholly recovered herself. “It is something to be borne — for the present. Perhaps — in time” —

“One has n’t any time to throw away at any age, — certainly not at yours. I shall not ask you what the obstacle is, and I shall not feel aggrieved if you do not confide it to me. But do you think one always knows one’s own affairs best? It is a very plausible theory, but it is not true.”

“The obstacle between us is his own child,” said Dolly desperately.

Mrs. Frazer looked up.

“Let me ask you one question. Does he know it?”

Dolly shook her head.

“No. She wrote me a letter in the fall after her visit — a very plain letter, in which she said — it is too humiliating to repeat — I cannot.”

Mrs. Frazer seemed taken quite unawares, yet she said, “I might have known it. It is like Gladys’s child. But it is not like his.”

She remembered the imperiousness and willfulness of the mother, her quiet pursuit of her own way, her —

“He worships her,” said Dolly wearily.

“And you? He cares nothing for you?” asked Mrs. Frazer, recalling her thought from Gladys.

“You forget that he does not know, and that I cannot tell him.”

“I admit that would be a difficult thing for you to do.”

“For any one to do,” said Dolly firmly.

“Yes, for any one.”

Apparently sobered by the information she had received, and at a loss for what to say, Mrs. Frazer went on playing with the chain of her lorgnette.

“You see,” said Dolly, rising and replacing the comb on her toilet-table, “there is nothing to be done.” She took up the candle and stood holding it in one hand. “We ought to go down. Margaret and Paul will think it very strange.”

“Have you consulted Paul?”

“Yes, I told Paul. Not because I expected it would do any good — I had to tell some one” — Her voice began to waver again.

“Put your candle down, dear. They are not thinking of us downstairs. What reply did you make to Mabel’s letter?”

“I asked her to make me a visit. She is coming next week.”

“With the purpose of speaking to her?”

Dolly put down the candle again and took the seat in the farther corner of the sofa.

“I could not let such a message pass unnoticed,” she said. “I am going to speak to Mabel myself. I will not have her for an enemy if I can help it — in any event.”

“An enemy!” exclaimed Mrs. Frazer wrathfully. “She is no one’s enemy but her own. You mean you are going to conciliate her?”

“You may put it so if you choose. It is worth the effort. I only want her to know me better. I have thought it all over, and there is nothing but my pride that stands in the way. I have put that aside. If I cannot lead her to see things differently before — by kindness — what could we do afterwards — by force? Paul wished me to tell Mr. Temple. I know what that would mean, because I know what I should do in like circumstances myself. He would stand by me.”

Mrs. Frazer listened in silence.

“Would you let me try my hand with Mabel?” she asked at length.

“I think that would hurt my pride still more,” said Dolly. “There are some things we cannot delegate to others without losing our self-respect. I should be thankful to put it all into some one else’s hands if I could — so thankful!”

“I do not think Mabel is a girl to be cajoled,” Mrs. Frazer went on, pursuing her own thought.

"I do not intend to cajole her," broke in Dolly indignantly.

"Well, conciliate then. She is not in the right, she is in the wrong — most decidedly in the wrong — a selfish girl, to be brought to her senses. You are not the person to do that, to say to her the things that ought to be said. Her father might, for he has authority on his side, — if she has an ounce of love for him in her, — but not you. You will find your pride alive the moment you speak, and if not your pride, then your sense of injustice. She needs a good shaking. Let me think this over," she said, getting up and stooping to Dolly's hair with her lips. "We must make no mistakes." There was something comforting in the plural pronoun. "Now bathe your face, dear, and come downstairs. I will go first and see what those two children are doing in their paradise."

She took Dolly's hand in hers, patting it reassuringly.

"Yes," said Dolly, "I will come in a moment." Then rising impulsively she followed the retreating figure to the door and kissed Mrs. Frazer's cheek. "Thank you," she said softly, "I am glad you spoke."

XV

JACK put Mabel, Miss Gaunt, and the maid in the train at Forty-second Street, and Mabel kissed him good-by affectionately without a single pang of conscience. It did not occur to her that her father was seriously fond of Mrs. Kensett, and if he were that was no reason why Mrs. Kensett should invade her realm, or take her papa away from her. She wanted her papa, as she did most things, for herself. To like and to love were not by any means the same, and love at Jack's age was an utterly absurd and untimely emotion. Love belonged to youth. Mrs. Kensett, barely thirty-five, was one of the old people. It was almost incredible that papas and mammas could ever have been actors in that passionate, entrancing drama, so mysteriously real as depicted in books, so verging on the ridiculous as observed in life. At all events marriage at her papa's time of life was neither a drama nor an idyl. It was a scheme, a design, a convention, in whose arrangement the principals were not the only parties to be consulted. Being disposed to scheme herself, she saw schemes in the most innocent events ; and being

confident of her power to twist Jack about her finger for innocent purposes, it was natural to impute the same power with evil designs to Mrs. Kensett. Poor, dear papa!

At the last moment Jack had given her a letter, a long blue envelope of business-like appearance, encircled by a rubber band, addressed to Mrs. Kensett, which Mabel had observed at once was unsealed.

"Mrs. Kensett's quarterly accounts are in here," Jack had said, "and I will let you hand them to her. You won't forget them, will you?"

"Do I ever forget things, papa?" said Mabel, putting the letter in the pocket of her dressing-case.

"No, you are a pretty reliable little girl." He was kissing her good-by. "You take your days of grace, but you pay your notes when they are due."

"I do keep my engagements and my promises, do I not, papa?"

He wanted to ask her to be her very best with Mrs. Kensett, but he did not know exactly how to express it; there were strangers present, and he let it go.

There were others of the party in the same drawing-room car, and there was much excitement and talk. Little Constance Montrevel, a short, dark girl of twenty, of quiet manner, and with the unmistakable charm of race and breeding in her plain

face, occupied a chair next Mabel, much to the latter's annoyance, who endeavored unsuccessfully to manœuvre her out of it in favor of Mr. Heald. "How stupid she is!" thought Mabel, for whom stupidity was often the obstruction of her wishes by unsuspecting people. She was the centre of all the conversation and gayety. One would have thought it was her party. She was making plans as if it were.

"You don't know the house, Constance. I do. The drawing-room is perfect for charades, or a play. There are two pillars near the end just right for a curtain. Don't you think it would be nice to have a play, Mr. Heald? Then there's a lovely winter garden. I do so love extraordinary things, palms and things from Africa — oh, and there's an African there, too — a real live one."

"Is he ebony, with ostrich plumes in his hair and rings in his ears?" asked Mr. Heald.

"How absurd you are! He's a cousin of Mrs. Kensett's, from the gold mines, too, — or perhaps it's diamonds, — which is it they have in Africa, Mr. Heald?"

"Both, Miss Temple. But they have no women to wear them. It's an export trade."

"Perhaps that is why he has come back. Constance dear, did you bring any of your lovely things? embroideries and laces, you know? I told you to. We must have one masked ball. Would n't

it be fun to invite the Westford people! I wonder if Mrs. Kensett will have any music. She always does things well. If she has, we can dance every night. There are lots of horses any way. I brought my riding-habit, — did you?"

Helen was sitting beyond Constance in the seat next Mr. Heald. There were roses in her cheeks and on her lips, and many a line that painters love in her form. One looked at her and understood that all the flowers do not open in May. She was the oldest of the company except Mr. Heald, and there was nothing to indicate that she was not on equal terms with the others. Constance liked her because she was quiet and had a low voice.

The talk subsided as the train moved out of the station into the roar and darkness of the tunnel. Looking out of the window Helen saw herself reflected from the black pane in the light of the electric lamps, and she remembered the young girl who once passed through that same tunnel alone, on her way from Boston to her new position in the New York boarding-school. It was such a different face which stared back at her from under the black hat plumes, and in the recollections suggested by her backward look it possessed so strange an interest for her that she stole glances at it as at a stranger whom she could only watch when unobserved.

She was annoyed at Mabel, at her assumption of managing Mrs. Kensett's affairs. Though it were only idle chatter it was bad taste, and under the circumstances inconceivable. But that did not astonish her so much as did her own feeling of annoyance and criticism. She had been expecting momentarily some outburst on Mabel's part, some coldness or irritation, indicating that Mabel *knew*. But except that her spirits seemed unaccountably high, almost forced, Mabel had shown nothing of the kind, and instead of exciting Mabel's animosity Mabel was exciting hers. She had experienced, too, a new desire to be constantly near her, as if she expected every moment that Mabel would speak, that a crisis was coming. Sitting beside Mr. Heald, it seemed to her that this accidental fact could not escape notice, and she turned her revolving chair further away from him toward the window.

"How hot it is," she said to Constance. "It makes one faint."

"Do you wish my salts?" asked Constance, unclasping the tiny vinaigrette from her belt.

"Thank you. Would you mind exchanging places with me? I want to speak to Mabel." Then she altered her mind. To change her seat was precisely what would attract attention. She would not be so silly. "No matter, I won't disturb you. It's of no consequence;" and turning to

Mr. Heald she began to talk, drawing Constance into the conversation.

In the excitement of meeting and the bustle of starting Mabel had not noticed the occupant of the chair on her left. The conversation on her right was too distant for her to join in it without effort, and as the train drew out of the tunnel she occupied herself with studying her neighbor, whom she mentally pronounced extraordinary. Mabel's eye for color did not approve of her costume, but she abandoned her investigations on discovering that a pair of lorgnettes were fixed upon her, and that she was under observation herself. So she drew a magazine from within her large Empire muff and settled herself to read. She had got as far as the illustrations when a grim, business-like voice said : —

“ Is not this Mabel Temple ? ”

Mabel lifted her violet eyes and somewhat freezingly assented.

“ I thought so. I used to know your mother. I am Mrs. Frazer.”

“ Oh, are you ? ” smiled Mabel, unbending. “ I did not know ” —

“ Naturally. You were in short dresses. But I knew you at once. You are the image of Gladys.”

“ Am I ? I am glad of that. Did you know my mother well ? ”

"Thoroughly," said Mrs. Frazer.

Mabel was sensitive about her mother, and the incisive word disconcerted her.

"And a very lovely woman she was," Mrs. Frazer went on. "The last time I saw her was at a dinner she gave on the yacht at Newport. You were a little girl and had soiled your pink frock, for which you deserved a scolding which you did not get. Your father saved you."

Mabel's smile grew brighter. She had put down her magazine and was leaning forward with an eager expression on her face. One of the secrets of her popularity was her quick interest in the person with whom she happened to be talking. It was of no consequence who the person was or what she really thought. Her interest in what the Bishop was saying was no less intense than that with which she listened to her partner in the pauses of the waltz.

"Was I such a naughty child? Poor mamma!"

"All children are trying," remarked Mrs. Frazer. "You were no exception. Gladys was."

"Do tell me about her, Mrs. Frazer." She was about to say that her father never spoke of her mother, but refrained.

"You have only to look in your mirror to see her. You are her child, not your father's."

"It is wonderful, is n't it, to be a reproduction

of some one. One always feels so different from every one else, in spite of what people say. I remember distinctly differing from mamma on a good many occasions. It was papa who always agreed with me."

"Those whom we most resemble are the very ones who are most annoyed to see themselves reproduced," said Mrs. Frazer. "So your papa agrees with you, does he?"

There was an amused smile on her face, and Mabel blushed.

"I know what you are thinking of," she said; "I have been told you thought I was spoiled."

Mrs. Frazer laughed good-humoredly. "One must be on one's guard against indulgent fathers, dear. They may prove a great misfortune. Nothing makes one so selfish as to be the object of unselfishness." The smile faded out of Mabel's face, and Mrs. Frazer changed the subject. "All these people are going to Cedar Hill, I presume. Who is that pretty girl over there?"

Mabel's eyes followed the lorgnette. "That is Helen, Miss Gaunt. She used to be my governess."

"And now?"

"Now? She is living with us still as — as my friend. Perhaps I am imitating papa and spoiling her. Would you like to see?" Her chance had come at last. "Helen, dear," — at a sign from

Mabel Helen left her seat, — “this is Mrs. Frazer, Margaret’s mother, you know. Will you take my seat for a little while? She wishes to speak to you.”

At last she had effected her purpose. She spoke in passing with those on the other side of the car, dropped into Helen’s vacant seat, opened up a fire of conversation with Constance, allowed it to languish, and finally, offering her magazine to Miss Montrevel, leaned her head back on the high cushion of her revolving chair, and turned slowly to Mr. Heald.

“Come here, I want to speak to you.”

She was looking straight before her out of the window.

At the sound of her imperious voice Mr. Heald, who had risen politely when she took her seat, sat down again and looked inquiringly into her half-averted face.

“Don’t look at me so,” said Mabel in a low voice; “look out the window. Do you see that little white house on the top of the hill? Look at that.”

He leaned forward, resting his arms on his knees, and began to study the landscape as directed.

“Do you think I have no eyes?” said Mabel.

“I always said they were the most beautiful ones I ever looked into,” he replied, obeying her injunction with difficulty.

Mabel's lashes closed for a moment and then opened again.

"Is that what you have been telling Helen?"

He made a quick, involuntary movement, but still obeyed her, keeping his eyes fixed on the little white house on the hill.

"I have been wanting to speak to you for some time," continued Mabel, "but you have either been invisible, — or inaccessible, of late."

"Is not that natural, Miss Temple?"

"You mean because I refused you? Perhaps. How long ago was that? Well, never mind, we have both forgotten, and it is of no consequence. What I wished to say to you, first, was that I asked Mrs. Kensett to invite you" —

"I am duly grateful, I assure you."

— "to Cedar Hill, in order that I might speak to you." She pronounced the words slowly and distinctly. "You have persistently avoided me since — since — I quite understand that. As you say, it is very natural. Then why did you ask papa's permission to call? Don't interrupt me. We'll say it was to save appearances, — yours, I mean. The first time, yes, — and the second, — but the third, last Thursday? Did you not see me making every effort to speak to you then? And at the Wendells', Monday, did I not go out of my way to" —

"Really, Miss Temple, you do me too much honor."

A quick flash of scorn lighted up her eyes.

"How simple you are ! or is it vanity ? Do you think I am relenting ?" And with a low ripple of laughter she turned her head on the other cheek toward Constance. Helen was still talking with Mrs. Frazer. Constance was fingering the leaves of the magazine. "They are clever, are n't they ? — those drawings of *Vierge* ?"

"Very," replied Constance.

Mabel turned back again.

"I intended to wait till we got to Cedar Hill, till I could speak more freely" —

"More freely !" he said ironically.

"Much more. But I will say this now, especially as you seem to be laboring under a misapprehension. I — will — not — have — you — play — with Helen."

Her voice was low, but distinct with suppressed energy. Mr. Heald stopped playing with his gloves. Then he laughed softly.

"Are *you* going to play at governess too ?"

"I am not playing at anything, and my relations with Helen are not the subject of discussion," replied Mabel quietly. "But since you have intimated that we have changed places I must correct you again. I am not taking Helen's place, she is taking mine, — the one I vacated."

"Are you speaking in her name, Miss Temple ?"

"I do not require her permission to speak,

and I shall not ask you to speak to her. — to tell her, for example, how quickly you recover from dependency."

"Mabel!"

"Hush! Have you no control over yourself? I am not talking harsh with you for your — your good spirit. You gambled, and lost, and you are too old a player to complain, and the loss was not worth making." The answer to her own heart was more than her words. "Is that what you would have me understand? Very good. But — don't say it to Helen. And don't consider me your enemy" — her voice softened a little — "on account of this — our past misunderstanding. I am not. I am only Helen's friend. There! let this drop it goes. You may look at me now. When are you laughing at me, Constance? Do let me see. You don't mean to say you have thought anything funny in?" —

Mr. Haskins broke in abruptly: "We shall speak of this again," he said, rising.

"Yes, sir," said Mabel, sitting up and pulling down the shade. "Are you going to smoke? When you come back we will talk it all over." She put him out of her sight's reach, and turned to Constance.

It was no time to place the sentence, explanation, or discussion, and Mr. Haskins knew how to wait. He went forward into the hall and found a man

by himself in the small compartment, and called for a whiskey and soda.

There were others of the Cedar Hill party in the same car, one of whom presently came to ask him to make a fourth hand at whist. But he declined. Mabel's sudden attack had completely confounded him. He was out of sorts with himself, and therefore with the rest of the world. But his opinion of her had risen immensely. What nerve the girl had!

He was not given to the self-analysis and retrospection which lead to weakness and indecision. He always charged off the past to profit and loss. The future was the real asset. But the past sometimes holds the key to the future, and then deserves consideration. Nerve, and insight too! It made him smile to think of it. No one had ever called him a gambler before, or had any reason to, in the literal sense of the word, since one day when he lost five thousand pounds and his ranch on the turn of a card. He had never touched one since. There were easier and surer ways of making money. He had tested the fallacy of growing up with a new country. The place to make money is where money is. But Mabel was right. She had called him by name, and he always admired any one who hit the nail squarely on the head. He *was* a gambler. Not by profession or of the coarser sort, but by nature, and with instincts suited to the times. The

times were sordid and commonplace, and money-making, like everything else, had degenerated into a mean trade. But if he had been born a hundred years earlier he might have been holding up travelers on the highroad, or cruising on the high seas with a black flag at the masthead, the dread of all gentry with gold sewed in their belts and — the devil take it! that was his weakness — a very prince of courtesy to the fair sex. He smiled at the picture as he rolled a fresh cigarette. It brought him back to Mabel with renewed admiration. If the old days were back again, when the art of transferring money from one neighbor's pocket to one's own was practiced by barons living in castles, he would like to be the knight to wear her scarf on his lance. And here he was leading germans and trading in curb stocks! It amounted to the same thing in the end, but it was not picturesque. Yes, she had a cool head and a lot of will. Who would have thought it, behind those violet eyes!

What was she driving at any way? She had refused him squarely, with such light-heartedness as to have deprived his advances of all seriousness. For that he had been grateful at the time, a little disappointed, — it was a good chance lost, — but she had not made him feel that he was mercenary. There was no sting in her answer, and on his part no resentment. It was an open door, carelessly shut, and he had passed on. Now he felt as if he

were a book cleverly read from cover to cover and laid aside not to be opened again. He admired her now, and with admiration came an exasperating sense of humiliation. She had described the situation exactly. He had seen an unusually big prize, an only child, with a wonderfully beautiful face and figure, and millions in prospect. And he had been fool enough to ask for these, as though they were the only stakes in the game! One thing was certain: she was very clever, and she had a heart. He had absolutely misjudged her.

And she had opened the book again — why? Why had she invited him to Cedar Hill? Merely to tell him that she was Helen's friend? If she were really and only that, why did she not warn Helen instead of him? It was true she had threatened to, but she had not done so yet. Such pure philanthropy was incredible. Could it be that she was jealous, that she was calling him back? Or was she just ugly and officious? The first hypothesis was more pleasing than the second, — but there was Helen. A demure little schoolmistress with a pretty face and not a penny. He had not seen her at first at all. He was not looking for pretty faces and empty pockets. And then, his venture in holding up the coach having proved a failure, in his confounded folly for gallantry he had paid a compliment to the loveliness of one of the passengers, — for she was lovely, — who had mistaken

compliments for love and romance for reality. Strange! that a tinsel flame should light the fires in the quiet depths of Helen's serious eyes, and that he should have thought there were no depths or seriousness in the others.

Whether under the influence of the whiskey and soda or the vision of Helen, he began to wander from the fixed moorings of sensible thinking down the current of dreaming. There were women so hungry that they were willing to give everything for nothing. Yet it was something, to take a woman who had nothing but herself to give, a homeless waif in the street as it were, cold and lonely and starving, and satisfy her, make himself the source of all her happiness, enthrone her. Could he really love her, and would he, after she was enthroned? He pulled himself together with a start. No, he might be a gambler, but he was not a sharper.

The truth was he had entered upon a course of conduct without attaching any importance to it, or giving any thought to its consequences. He was angry, compassionately angry, with Helen for her simplicity; and he was angry, regretfully angry, with Mabel for appearing in the second act after having expired in the first. He was afraid that he understood Helen only too well. He was resolved to understand Mabel better, and he threw away his cigarette with this determination.

The train had just stopped, and the dining-car was being put on. He went out upon the platform and was among the first to enter it, appropriating a corner table, set for two. It was at the forward end of the car behind the open corridor door, and was necessarily passed by all who came in. Mabel was among the last. He pushed the door aside when he saw her, and offered her his seat.

"For me?" she said, "how nice of you! I like corner seats where I can see every one."

She was always at her ease, an ease which, as he had reason to know, could provoke an unwarranted assurance, or keep him, as now, at an uncomfortable distance. If one had not known Gladys one would wonder how so young a girl had acquired it. Being inherited, it bore no resemblance to the acquired, artificial article. But he was resolved on forcing her hand.

"You don't mind continuing our conversation?" he asked, putting her muff and magazine in the rack overhead and sitting down opposite her.

"Indeed no. On the contrary, I want to."

She was taking off her gloves, watching the other members of the party as they took their seats. Helen and Mrs. Frazer were at the farther end of the car. She exchanged a smile with Helen, laid her gloves beside her plate, and took up the menu.

"Bouillon, of course," she exclaimed, "always bouillon! No, I don't want any" — to the waiter.

"How they do hurl the courses at you! like the night advertisements in Madison Square, and snatch them away as quickly. What time do we arrive at Westford? Do you remember?"

"I think it is about three hours. We left New York at noon. That would make it three o'clock."

"You have never been there?"

"No, this is my first visit, thanks to you."

"Is it? Why, I thought you and Mrs. Kensett were old friends. Perhaps I ought not to have asked her to invite you."

"I hope you are not regretting it already."

"No. Are you? I thought you would think it very nice and friendly in me, after our little quarrel."

"Are you never serious, Mabel?"

"Why should you think I am not serious? At least I am always serious about serious things. When was I not? Isn't the fault yours — that you do not take me seriously?"

"I took you seriously once, and I thought I understood you then. I don't understand you now."

She laughed. "The question seems to be which can understand the other first. That is quite true — in a way. You will admit though that I have not asked you any questions. I only gave you a warning. I suppose it is difficult for you to appreciate my feelings toward Helen, — and that

puzzles you. You think of her as she used to be, as what she thinks she is, — my governess. But, you see, you are both mistaken. She is not looking after me, I am looking after her. She is quite a child. It is really very extraordinary how little age counts. She learns some things with much more difficulty than I used to learn the lessons she gave me, and she does not forget her lessons as easily as I do mine. You must understand this, first, about Helen, that she is a mere child; and then this, about me, that I am fond of her, — more fond of her than she has any reason to be of me. That is what I wished to say to you, and that is all I think I am called upon to say. If you are as serious as I am you need not fear my interference.”

He was looking at her while she spoke, but nothing in her face belied her frankness. It was not a frankness, however, which told him what road to take. It left him at the crossways. He felt the constraint of their surroundings and wished he had waited.

“I suppose I ought to be grateful to you,” he said, “even though you are actuated solely by your interest in Miss Gaunt.”

He paused, looking straight into her eyes.

“Yes?” she said, as if expecting him to go on.

“But are you not drawing inferences from rather slender premises?”

“I think not.”

“In certain circumstances,” he hazarded, feeling his way carefully, “a man does not know what he is doing.”

A kindly smile came into her eyes.

“Yes, exactly. Sometimes, in pique, or desperation, we do what cannot be undone as easily as what was done in seriousness. And then, you know, we misunderstand each other so dreadfully. Perhaps I spoke too impulsively a little while ago. But I really meant nothing that was not friendly.”

“Friendly to whom?” he thought. “To him, or to Helen?”

She had gathered up her gloves and was looking out of the window with something indecisive and appealing in her face.

“Mabel.” She did not appear to hear him. “Mabel,” he repeated, “don’t you know we can never be — friends.”

She turned and looked at him, another little vanishing smile in her eyes, like a lip’s quiver.

“Perhaps we can, after years and years,” she said. “Friendship is a very slow-growing plant, you know, — not like the other. And if you are so sure it cannot live you must not call me Mabel.” And then the smile became an ordinary one. “Will you give me my muff, please? And will you come over with me to Mrs. Frazer’s table? I want to introduce you. We can have our coffee there with them.”

XVI

As she had anticipated, Mabel found that she and Helen were to share the same room. There was a small parlor opening out from it, and both rooms bore evidence to a thoughtfulness not to be attributed to servants' hands. She had anticipated that also.

Shortly after their arrival tea and deliciously hot toast were served in the parlor, and on leaving the tray the butler had announced dinner for eight o'clock. There was no luxury Mabel loved more than time, and after tea and a refreshing bath, while Helen and her maid Marie were emptying the trunks and putting things in order, she sat in the deep easy-chair before the parlor fire, lost in thought. There were two whole hours yet before she need think of dressing. Her writing materials had just been arranged on the table near her, and this reminded her of the letter for Mrs. Kensett. As the envelope was unsealed she felt no compunction in opening it. It contained a smaller envelope, also unsealed, and another closed, and endorsed "Mrs. Kensett's Statement," with the date. The note in the former read as follows:—

MY DEAR MRS. KENSETT, — I am sending you by Mabel the usual statement for this quarter. It contains nothing to which I need call your attention. According to what I understood from Paul to be your wish, all the proceeds of the sale of the Argonaut stock, except the original net cost of your share thereof, has been credited to the person named in the remaining certificates, and converted into four per cent registered bonds which I hold subject to further orders. As your account showed a large idle balance I have reinvested a part of it as per memorandum herewith.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN TEMPLE.

Mabel returned the note to its envelope with the reflection that it was very like papa, and lapsed into thought.

What a queer person Mrs. Frazer was! She rather liked her, she was so brusque and refreshing. What was it to be spoiled? There was Helen, working away in the adjoining room. She was always doing something. Was it true that unselfish people made others selfish? Things got done somehow, just as they were being done now in the next room, if one left them to others. The only spoiled persons she knew among her acquaintances were either bad or sour, like spoiled fruit or cream. She was neither of these.

"Helen dear, are n't you tired? Do come in and sit down."

"Yes, in a minute."

Mabel went to the door and looked in. Her evening dress was laid out on the bed, her stockings and slippers on the chair beside it. The toilet-table glittered with the array of her silver, and Marie was hanging the last skirt in the wardrobe. There did not appear to be much to do.

"You are all through, are n't you?" she said.

"Almost," replied Helen. "But I have n't had my bath yet."

Mabel had not thought of that, and returned to her chair.

Above the fireplace hung an old Venetian mirror with beveled edges and figures sunk in intaglio on the back. Mabel's eyes rested on it admiringly. It was an exceedingly good specimen. And the Dresden china clock on the mantel was unusually pretty too, much prettier than her own. She might have thought the same thing had the two changed places. She had a keen appreciation for good things, but the pleasure they afforded began to diminish immediately after possession.

What was it to be spoiled? The thought came back persistently. She certainly had not spoiled Helen. She remembered her as she was when she first came to Gramercy Park. How awkward and prim she was then, with her conscientious efforts

to instruct and discipline! No, Helen was decidedly improved. She was more at her ease, dressed better, spoke better French, was in every way happier. And all this was due to her — Mabel. If her father had had his way Helen would be a faded little old schoolmistress, or darning the family stockings in Boston. There was such a thing as being spoiled by success, however.

A knock at the door roused her from her reflections. It was only a servant who came to remove the tray. She gave him the envelope with the request that it should be delivered at once to Mrs. Kensett, and then began a note to her father announcing her safe arrival and the delivery of his letter. This occupied her but a moment, and she sat down again before the fire. She thought of her papa's visit to the Vixen, and wondered whether he would remember to order the new deck awnings. She thought of his Christmas alone, and wondered what her Christmas presents would be. He always gave her something handsome. He was generally at a loss to know what it should be, and on the alert for any chance suggestion as to what she most wanted, and she wondered which of several hints furnished him through Helen and other roundabout channels would bear fruit. She wondered, too, who would take her out to dinner. And then, having exhausted lesser things, — she knew that they *were* all lesser things, so many decoys with which she

was endeavoring to divert her mind from something else, — she got up and went into the other room, inspected it again carefully, and returned once more to her chair. She had always known what she wanted, her own mind. And she had commonly had her own way. If she was not, like Helen, transparent to others, she at least understood herself, which was a long step toward conquering obstacles presented from without. A good deal of will and a little tact did the rest. Now there was something *within*, something distinct and different from her old self, something disconcerting, vague, powerful, beyond her control, like a poison taken unawares. It was as if into her house of life had entered a stranger, whose presence she felt and was seeking to avoid, who was disputing her sovereignty and confusing her plans. It was worse than being thwarted, this not knowing any longer what she wanted. At all events she did not want to think, and with a glance at the clock she was about to begin her dressing when there was a knock on the door, and to her surprise Mrs. Frazer appeared.

“I am making a tour of inspection to see that all you young people are properly taken care of,” she said. “May I come in?”

“Do, Mrs. Frazer, do!” cried Mabel. “We could not be more comfortable. Mrs. Kensett always makes one feel at home.”

“Yes, it is the only house I ever visit. I dislike

visiting, and visitors. This turning of one's house into a hotel is not to my taste. I am going to sit down with you for a few minutes before dressing, if you do not mind."

Society just then was a distinct relief to Mabel, and the interruption to her thoughts most welcome. Besides, ever since Mrs. Frazer had told her that she had known her mother she had wanted to talk with her again about Gladys.

"You will excuse my dressing-gown, won't you, dear Mrs. Frazer?"

"Yes indeed, child. And you will allow me to have my cigarette with you?"

She seated herself in Mabel's comfortable chair and produced a jeweled case from her pocket.

"It is a very tyrannical habit," she said, "and very offensive to many people's prejudices. But I do not mind disturbing their prejudices if I do not disturb their comfort."

She shook with a little soundless laugh as she spoke, in which Mabel joined. There was a suggestion of motherhood about this childless woman which Mabel felt, perhaps the more quickly because she was motherless. She pulled the footstool from under the table and sat down at Mrs. Frazer's feet.

"I always admired your mother," Mrs. Frazer continued, "for her consideration of others. It was perhaps an art, but we do not criticise motives and methods when the results are so satisfactory."

"I like to have you speak of my mother," said Mabel. "No one ever does, because — no doubt they think" — she turned her face away thoughtfully — "it would be a painful subject to me."

"You refer to the circumstances of her death, I suppose," said Mrs. Frazer bluntly.

"Yes."

"Have you never spoken with your father of them?"

"Never. There are some subjects of which I should never dare speak with papa."

"You must remember, dear, that your father is thirty-five years older than you. We old people sometimes manage to share our children's lives, but we never really share ours with our children. We understand you because we have been children ourselves, but you cannot understand us till you have replaced us. You should not misjudge your father. We cannot talk of the serious things of experience with those who have not had any."

Marie came in to draw the shades and light the candles.

"I like the firelight best," Mabel said interrogatively, and Mrs. Frazer assented. "Is n't it possible you do not understand us as well as you think you do?" She had closed the door into the bedroom and was standing by the window, talking to the world inanimate slowly retreating into the shadows. "Experience must begin some time.

We have perceptions at any rate, and we do a good deal of quiet thinking." Then she came back to her stool and looked up into Mrs. Frazer's face. "Silence implies" — she hesitated — "I want to ask you a question. Was mamma to blame? I don't believe it, but I want to know."

"My dear," replied Mrs. Frazer, looking down into the upturned eyes, "you ask a very difficult question. The machinery of justice in this world is a very clumsy affair. It is quite necessary, but it mangles one dreadfully, and I never set it in motion if I can help it."

"But one *must* have justice," remonstrated Mabel. "Is it impossible to answer my question? Is it because you cannot, or because you do not wish to?"

"There are very few questions which can be answered by a yes or no. That your mother was to blame in any harsh sense of the word — no. But we sometimes, especially at your age, step beyond our depth, and then the question of responsibility becomes a very delicate one. What we do in the surprise and terror of finding that we have lost our foothold and cannot swim is one thing, what we do before is another."

"But we do not know or realize beforehand."

"No, we are impulsive, or thoughtless, careless of consequences, most often inexperienced. But the world will tell you that when you steer in from

the open sea under the headlands you cannot make sudden squalls an excuse, or plead that you did not see them coming. They are to be expected, — like holes in one's stockings. That is why we old people are forever preaching caution. It is very disagreeable in us, and very tiresome, to be continually searching the skies for storms which may never come. But then, you have your own barometer, — consult that."

"What barometer?" asked Mabel.

"Some people call it conscience. You do not like the word, do you, dear?" Mrs. Frazer touched the bent head with her plump hand.

"I don't object to it," said Mabel.

"Nor I. We must not take too narrow a view of it. It indicates far more than duty, and is not a mere whip. It indicates danger. One should think of it as a friendly counselor who warns us, as our other senses do, of hot coals or bad odors. The important thing is to keep it in the sun, and above all — read it yourself. Don't let others consult it for you. The last thing I should ever attempt would be to tell you what you ought to do. What a pretty dressing-gown you have on, dear. Where did you get it?"

"Marie made it," said Mabel absent-mindedly. She was playing with the rings in her lap.

"She must be a treasure. Dear me!" as the clock on the mantel chimed seven. "Is it so late?"

Punctuality is my one virtue. I can't slip into a dress as quickly as I used to. Good-by, dear." And at the door — "I rather think we shall get on well together."

Mabel's face brightened in assent, and the door closed.

"Whom were you talking with?" asked Helen, coming in from her bath.

"Mrs. Frazer. She is queer, isn't she? But don't you find her rather nice? You had a long talk with her in the train."

"I thought she was somewhat inquisitive," replied Helen.

"Inquisitive? About what?"

"Oh, about everything."

"Can't you be more specific? Did you give me a good character?"

"She did not refer to you. She asked me about myself and my family."

"She was not inquisitive with me at all," said Mabel. "I could get nothing out of her." She had rung for her maid, and Marie was dressing her hair. "She isn't a bit like Margaret. You and Margaret will like each other, I am sure."

"Don't *you* like Miss Frazer?"

"Why, yes, in a way. She is one of those persons who holds herself aloof, — very sweet and gracious, you know, but always just so far away."

“And you think I succeed with persons of that description, do you?” laughed Helen.

“I think you succeed with most any one — when you try.” Helen turned and looked at her. “You made quite an impression on Mrs. Frazer. She told me she thought you were very pretty.”

“Nonsense,” said Helen, coloring.

She was dressing her hair at the toilet-table beside her bed, and Mabel from her chair before the pier-glass saw the color come. It was not the flush of annoyance, but of self-satisfaction and superiority, — at least Mabel thought so, and in her nervous condition Helen’s silence and tranquillity irritated her. Was there any reason for it? She was resolved to know. She *must* know.

“You may come in twenty minutes, Marie,” she said to the maid when her task was finished; “at twenty minutes to eight.”

She sat for a moment before the glass after Marie had gone, adding a personal touch here and there to her hair, and then resumed the conversation where it had ended a few minutes before.

“I think so too.”

“Think what?” asked Helen.

“That you are very pretty.” Helen’s heart began to beat. Mabel was not given to praising her. But she went on dressing in silence. “I have thought so myself,” pursued Mabel; “these last two weeks especially.”

Helen turned again, and this time caught Mabel's eyes in the glass. She tried a disdainful smile of superiority to such nonsense, but failed.

"Why don't you tell me all about it, dear?" exclaimed Mabel suddenly, wheeling about on her chair.

"About what?" said Helen, with an effort at indifference.

"Or don't I inspire confidence?"

Helen made another ineffectual effort at apathy. "Not when you talk in riddles."

Mabel got up and went over to where she stood, with the impulse to put her arms about her and kiss her into confession. But she did not. She sat down instead on the edge of the bed where she could look up into Helen's face. Her curiosity was not purely disinterested, and the consciousness that the sincerity of her caress depended too much upon what Helen should say checked her.

"Have n't we lived together long enough to warrant a little frankness?"

Helen felt her presence of mind deserting her, and said the first thing that came to her lips.

"You are not very frank with me, Mabel."

"Not frank with you! Why, what have I to be frank about? No one is in love with me. You foolish girl! It is perfectly plain that Mr. Heald is paying you marked attention." The color rushed up again like the waves of a rising tide. "You

cannot deny that. And I am tremendously interested — tremendously. I want to know all about it. Why should you be so shy? Has he — spoken to you?”

“No — not exactly,” said Helen. She would have unburdened herself in a moment but for the haunting suspicion that her position was not secure.

“Not exactly!” echoed Mabel, bursting into laughter. “I really believe you are turning into a finished coquette, Helen. But you certainly are not a worldly person. Everything depends upon whether you love him — do you?”

“He has n’t asked me,” said Helen, wavering.

It was all clear now, but Mabel went on. “He will, if you let him — *do* you?”

“Please don’t say any more, Mabel. You torture me. I don’t wish to speak of it — I don’t know.”

“Well I do, and if you wish to know yourself I will tell you how you can — just suppose you could not have him.”

She might have said the words so gently, so reassuringly, as to have helped one in difficulty to a better knowledge of self; but they were not meant so. She knew they were cruel, and felt a certain keen pleasure. The color went from Helen’s face, and a scared look came into her eyes. She saw Mabel, with her beauty, her millions, and her

daring, and a miserable feeling of her own nothingness swept over her. She despised herself for it, and for the terrifying discovery that she could not despise *him*. Yet she wanted Mabel to go on now, to have it over. But with one of those sudden changes of mood which alter the whole tone of a conversation, Mabel exchanged the rôles.

"I did not mean to torture you, Helen. I did not know the subject was one which ever did torture. Perhaps, some day, you will deign to enlighten me — with the rest of the world."

It was Mabel's way to unexpectedly and illogically convert herself into the aggrieved party. Helen had had experience with it before, and had determined again and again not to yield to it. But she always did, and succumbed once more to the old spell.

"Mabel, dear," she said tremulously, sitting down beside her on the bed and putting her arms round her, "don't speak so. I could be happy — very happy — if I knew you were." She had not intended to say so much, but when her presence of mind deserted her she always said more or less than she meant to.

"If *I* were!" repeated Mabel, growing rigid.

"I mean," said Helen, feeling the chill, "I thought that once" — she drew back as she spoke but plunged on — "that at one time he — that you" —

For the one brief moment in which Helen was struggling with words Mabel kept still, her lips tight, her eyes fixed, a figure of stone. Then with a desperate effort she pulled herself together.

"That I would not approve. You thought that. Why should you? You have not got to consult me." Marie was knocking at the door. "Yes, Marie, come in" — for Marie was hesitating on the threshold. "We shall be late if you do not hurry, Helen."

Bewildered, Helen sat down before her dressing-table again. Were all her fears, then, so foolish? She was conscious of Marie's eyes, and her fingers bungled.

"Go and help Miss Gaunt, Marie," said Mabel; and Marie, who saw that something had happened, tactfully endeavored to supply the conversation.

At last they were ready.

"Come, it is striking eight," said Mabel.

In the corridor, outside the door, before they went down, she caught Helen's hand and pressed it tightly. "You silly girl! If Reginald Heald asks you to marry him, and you consent, I shall be" — she hesitated for the right word — "delighted — simply *delighted*."

It was the conditional mood, but in the wave of relief which swept over her Helen did not notice it, and she returned the pressure of Mabel's hand with a light-heartedness she had not known for days.

XVII

THE Bishop stood at the farther end of the drawing-room with Mrs. Frazer, as Dolly received her guests. He had been at Lemington selecting a site for the new church with Professor Fisher, and needed no urging to accept the invitation to dinner. Miss Fisher, who was not at ease on formal occasions, had managed to find an excuse satisfactory to her conscience, strict truthfulness being always her first consideration. Her brother, never anything else than at home on all occasions, accompanied the Bishop "with the greatest pleasure."

There was a momentary hush as Mabel entered the room, the involuntary pause a lovely rose compels when one walks through a garden. She was radiantly beautiful, and to those who, like Helen, knew her in her unbending, willful moods, the air of distinction and sovereignty she assumed with an evening dress was always a source of fresh surprise and admiration. The Bishop, who respected all powers, human and divine, and never failed to claim the paternal right associated with his office, went forward to pay his homage and assert his

spiritual relationship after she had greeted Dolly ; then he returned to Mrs. Frazer's side at what might be called the throne end of the room, which he occupied in what Mabel styled his monumental capacity.

"They are wonderful things, youth and beauty," he said to Dolly, as he gave her his arm and they followed the others down the broad stairway. "'To be young,' as the poet says, 'is very Heaven.'"

It was not very complimentary, Dolly thought, but she smiled, feeling it true.

"How many secrets lie in the hearts of all these roses," Mrs. Frazer was saying to Paul, with whom she led the way into the dining-room.

"I wish they were all as happy ones as mine," he replied.

"Yours!" she retorted contemptuously; "try to pay me a little more attention, or it will be out before the evening is over. You forget I am an important personage for you hereafter."

Mabel had taken Mr. Heald's arm with an inward approval of Mrs. Kensett's arrangements and the outward hauteur she kept in reserve for certain situations, checking the expression of his good fortune with the remark that that depended upon what use he made of it.

She sat on Dolly's right beyond the Bishop, and made the latter her ally by listening with unaffected

interest to all the plans for worthy students with which he was at the moment occupied.

“And where is your father?” he asked, looking down the table as though he expected to see him.

“Papa?” said Mabel. “He is having his holiday. You see, I am away, and to-morrow he will be on the deck of the Vixen.”

“He is not cruising in winter,” said the Bishop, sipping his sherry.

“Oh no, he is only getting ready to. He loves to smell tar and ropes. I have been trying to persuade him to buy a steam yacht. I like to be sure of getting where I am going to. But he prefers to battle with the elements. He says a steam yacht is nothing but a hotel. Are you fond of the water, Mrs. Kensett?” she asked, bending forward and speaking over the Bishop’s plate.

“I am fond of it, but I am afraid of it. I should prefer the steamer, as you do, though I fear my reasons would do me less credit than yours.”

“Papa is so absurdly fond of the Vixen,” continued Mabel. “She is my one rival in his affections.”

“One!” exclaimed the Bishop, playing with his glass. “And how many has he in yours?”

“Absolutely none, my dear Bishop,” laughed Mabel.

“Ab actu ad posse valet consecutio,” he replied, returning her smile.

"Are you saying something nice or horrid? Helen," called Mabel, leaning forward again and speaking to Helen, who sat beyond Mr. Heald, "do help me. The Bishop is talking Greek."

"Latin, my dear young lady, Latin," interposed the Bishop. "I was only saying that it was safe to argue from what has been to what will be."

Helen was not so proud of her dead languages as formerly, but smiled brightly as Mr. Heald whispered, "Latin for the Romans!"

"I can't draw such fine distinctions," declared Mabel.

It amused the Bishop greatly to hear the difference between Greek and Latin called a fine distinction, and he repeated Mabel's remark, first to Dolly and then to the Professor sitting opposite him. The Professor, not being gifted with a sense of humor, after pondering over the subject and vainly endeavoring to join in the conversation, resolved to ask Mabel on some more favorable opportunity what her point of view was.

Notwithstanding several pleasant things said at dinner, Helen found the effect of Mabel's reassuring declaration in regard to Mr. Heald wearing away with the evening. There was a pause, if not a change, in his manner. She reminded herself that she had herself insisted upon the pause; but women do not always expect to be taken at their word, or, at least, to be obeyed so literally as to

make it difficult for them to change the counter-sign. She possessed none of Mabel's skill in manœuvring, nor any desire for it, but she did find mere courtesy unsatisfying. Nor was it pleasant to feel that if he was giving her more than her due of table-talk, it was because Mabel was neglecting him.

When the men came into the drawing-room Mr. Heald managed to get in his few words of private conversation with Dolly.

"Under ordinary circumstances, my dear Mrs. Kensett," he said, "I should not have presumed to offer you my advice, but having been honored by your confidence at the outset, I felt I could not exaggerate my responsibility. To be quite frank, my own confidence is as great as ever; but there will very likely be a period of exploration during which the market value of the stock would naturally decline. My only reason for asking you to regard my advice as confidential was the wish to explain to you in person that it was founded on excess of caution, — nothing more."

"I quite appreciated your suggestion," said Dolly. "It was very thoughtful of you, but the stock had been already sold."

"Already! you have the true *flair* of the speculator."

"Oh no, Mr. Heald, that is the last thing I aspire to. Mr. Temple, who is my business adviser, thought it more prudent" —

"Quite right, quite right," rejoined Mr. Heald.
"Mr. Temple's judgment is excellent."

Dolly thought he seemed annoyed, but the subject had lost interest for her, and she allowed it to drop.

"Come," she said, taking him over to the group where Paul was standing, "we are to have a toboggan party to-morrow morning. You must help me arrange it."

Paul had been possessed all the evening by the vague conviction that he had seen Mr. Heald somewhere before, — one of those convictions which lead nowhere, but will not be shaken off. He had talked with him after dinner, but the conversation had yielded no clue. He said to himself that it did not matter whether he had seen him before or not, yet he went on pursuing the idea as one always does pursue a thought which has broken away from all orderly connections. On coming in from the smoking-room he had been drawn by Margaret's presence to the circle near the conservatory door, but before reaching her side Mabel intercepted him.

"Have you begun your observations?" she asked, as he came up. "Because I release you."

"My observations?" he repeated, not understanding her.

"I am glad you have forgotten. It was a very disagreeable and utterly impossible task I set you."

"I was going to ask you to let me off," said Paul, recollecting.

"Were you? why?" rejoined Mabel, becoming suddenly interested.

"Because, as you know very well, such estimates are not serious. One's eyes do not get in focus on so short an acquaintance. If I made a good report it would only count as flattery" —

"And if you made a bad one I should not believe it! But I was not thinking of myself at all when I asked you. I only wanted to know what your ideal was. For of course you would try me by some standard, real or imaginary. It is interesting to know what people's standards are."

"You are talking the wildest nonsense, child," broke in Mrs. Frazer. "If his standard is the ordinary one by which men judge women, we know beforehand what it is; and if it is the extraordinary one which he has discovered personified in the flesh, it would not interest us."

"Why not?" asked Mabel.

"Because no woman is ever flattered by the choice of another. As for eyes," she said to Paul, "there is nothing like a long acquaintance for getting them out of focus."

"What are you all talking about so earnestly?" asked Dolly, coming up with Mr. Heald.

"About people's judgments of us," said Mabel. "Which is the true one, Mrs. Kensett, — the

acquaintance's, whose eyes are not yet in focus, or the friend's, whose eyes have got out again?"

"That depends upon the judge," said Dolly simply. "We are not mere bundles of facts on which to base final opinions, but" —

"But what, Mrs. Kensett?" said Helen, who felt Dolly was struggling with a personal message.

"But bundles of possibilities in which one finds what one is looking for. You must ask the Bishop or Professor Fisher," she added, smiling, and calling herself back to her surroundings. "I have a much simpler proposition to make, — a toboggan party to-morrow after breakfast."

The music began in the conservatory while Dolly's proposal was under discussion, and a young attaché from Washington came to ask Mabel for the opening waltz.

"Don't you think, Mrs. Kensett," she said, as she took his arm, "it would be nice to have some charades to-morrow evening?"

"Yes, indeed, I was thinking of it myself."

"Then you don't mind my suggesting it, do you?"

"Why certainly not, Miss Temple. It is exactly what I wish you to do."

Mabel left her partner's arm for a moment and laid her hand on Dolly's. "Please don't call me Miss Temple, Mrs. Kensett," she whispered. "I want to be Mabel to you."

Dolly was almost ready to believe that her troubles were of her own creation, or that Mabel had experienced a change of heart. Or did the girl seriously think that her admonition had been effective, and that she could heal the wound she had made by a little amiability? The thought sent a flush of pride and indignation to Dolly's face. As Mrs. Frazer had predicted, it was not so easy to put pride to sleep.

"She somehow contrives to get inside your defenses," said Mrs. Frazer in a low tone to Dolly, as they watched the dancers from their chairs. "She is very like her mother, sensitive and arrogant, with a personality that manages to atone for its own offenses. The danger is that she is young, a child playing with fire, which is nothing unusual, and in any house but our own would be none of our concern."

Mabel went in to supper with the Professor.

"You were speaking at dinner of fine distinctions, Miss Temple," he began. "I wanted to ask you" —

"Was I?" laughed Mabel. "Very likely. I never make them. If I do I get lost in the fog directly."

"I do not quite understand your point of view. Distinctions tend to clarify."

"Are you a great friend of the Bishop's?"

"Why certainly," said the Professor, taken aback. "The Bishop and I" —

“So am I. But listen to his next sermon. He can split a color into so many shades you cannot tell black from white. After he has walked round and round and round a subject you feel positively dizzy.”

“But one must analyze first in order to generalize afterwards.”

“You must n’t do either now if you want any supper,” said Mabel, smiling into the spectacles, — and then a voice at her elbow set her heart beating.

“May I speak to you a moment, Miss Temple? Mrs. Kensett has asked me to arrange the toboggan party for to-morrow morning.”

She knew from the tone and manner that this was only a pretext.

“Certainly,” she said; and excusing herself to the Professor she rose and followed Mr. Heald.

“What is it?” she asked, a shade of anxiety in her words.

“I have just received a telegram from New York, and must go down at once. I shall try to return, to-morrow if possible, but I may have to go out West, perhaps for a long time — on urgent business. I want to speak to you — *now*. I must. There is no one in the conservatory. Come.”

It was less an entreaty than a command, and Mabel followed him again. In the few steps which separated them from the seat under the palms to

which he led her a hundred thoughts rushed through her mind. Above all, that this man was going to sound her heart, tear away the veils, expose her. She struggled with herself for a plan of action, the plan she had not been able to form in leisure, and which would, in a few seconds, have to be acted upon. There had been a strange exciting pleasure in indecision, in saying *shall I* or *shall I not*. That was over. She must answer. Under all the indecision had been the reality, the truth. What was it? What was the horrible power which had prevented her from being true to herself?

He stood before her determined, as if done with obedience. She noticed the difference in the short interval before he spoke. She could have managed supplication better.

"Mabel!" He uttered the word passionately, the passion of authority and ownership. She did not resent it, she responded to it, against every effort of her will. It was the voice of her master, — she loved him. The veil fell from her eyes with his first word. But she met his without flinching. He thought it was her superb nonchalance. He would break through it.

"There is no time to waste in words, Mabel, — do you love me?"

Her eyes had not faltered or fallen.

"Answer me, — yes or no?"

"Do you want the truth?"

"Nothing but the truth — this time."

"No."

It was a lie, and she knew he knew it, but it gained her a breathing-time.

"You said so once before and I believed you. I will not believe you now."

"What made you believe me then?" She was sitting rigid in the chair, her hands clasping the arms tightly.

"Because you made me. You cannot do it again."

"Yes, I know. I ridiculed you. I hurt your pride. Well — I did wrong. So did you. It would have been better if you had not believed me. Hush!" she cried to what she saw in his face, "don't speak! I *cannot* love you."

"Cannot!"

"Cannot and will not. I might." Her face was growing white, but she went on resolutely. "You have made it impossible."

"I?"

"You. If you want the truth you must give it. You have made Helen love you. Why, you know best. *Do* you know it, or not? Did you mean she should? want her to? which was it? No matter. I said I might love you — I retract nothing — whichever it was. It is true. I might."

"Mabel," he cried, seizing her hands, "you *do!*"

For signs of lesser promise he would have taken her in his arms, but something in her attitude told him that she was out of his reach.

“Don’t touch me. I said I *might*. You have made Helen love you.”

“I have not,” he said doggedly.

“Let that go. She does. She has told me. I don’t blame you. We won’t blame each other,” — her voice had grown pitifully low, — “we will blame ourselves instead. I confess my share. When you asked me before I did not know — what I have learned in this chair — that I could love you. You asked me in the train if I was calling you back. If I was, I did not know it. I was jealous. I did not understand Helen then. Now I do. You asked for the truth. You ought to be satisfied.”

She covered her face with her hands. He tried to drag them away from her eyes. He remembered doing so at another time, with Helen, and almost the same words he had spoken then came to his lips again.

“Mabel,” he pleaded, “do you think I will submit” —

She lifted her face with the old imperious light in it.

“Certainly. For one of two reasons. Either because” — her voice broke, she waited a moment, then went on — “because you care for me enough

to do the only thing I shall ever ask of you, or because you love Helen, — it does not matter which.”

“Mabel, you are mad, mad! Miss Gaunt has no right to” —

“Stop!” she cried, “I do not want to hear. You have *let* her love you. That is enough.”

It was so true that for an instant he could say nothing. He took a few steps away, then came back again.

“You seriously mean that because in a moment of pique, of desperation, I paid a compliment to a woman I do not love, you will sacrifice the woman I do, our lives, to no purpose? Think what you are doing.”

“I am thinking of what I will *not* do. I have promised Helen” —

“Promised her what? What was not yours to give. You can refuse my love and trample it under your feet, — you cannot give it to her. O Mabel!” he whispered, taking her cold hands in his warm ones.

She felt her courage going, the temptation to let go, not to struggle any more, an overpowering desire to yield, to shut her eyes and abandon herself to something stronger than sleep, sweeter than life. The thin, high note of a violin came from the door of the drawing-room, like a rifle-shot to a dreaming sentinel. She sat up as if indeed waking from

a dream, every sense alert again. "Go — go — have you no pity!"

One minute more, he thought, and he would have conquered.

"Give me my gloves." The musicians were taking their seats at the farther end of the conservatory. They were no longer alone. He stooped for her gloves.

"You must give me this waltz," he said in a low voice. "It will give you time to recover yourself." She gave him a grateful look and nerved herself to face the lights.

The floor was crowded with dancers, and she gave herself up to the motion and music in a sort of trance, seeing no one.

"Take me to Mrs. Frazer," she whispered when it was over.

"A horrid dance," said Mrs. Frazer. "It takes one's breath away to watch it. You look positively giddy."

"I am," replied Mabel, fanning herself. "I shall not dance any more to-night."

XVIII

THE Argonaut mine, although a new property, had proved a remarkably successful one. The stock, however, had never reached the level justified by its earnings. There were several reasons for this discrepancy. The ore presented difficulties of treatment which had not yet been surmounted; the formation was one not admitting of any positive predictions for the future; and, above all, the management, of which little was known, made no adequate public statements. But, as is not infrequently the case, the declaration of the usual dividend was considered news enough, and, with the exception of an occasional outburst of criticism, distrust had never crystallized into concerted aggressive action. Men of good judgment and common sense unaccountably abandon all claims to either when they join to form a crowd.

At the time of the last assessment the statement appeared that the outlook was sufficiently encouraging to warrant the erection of a new mill, equipped with the modern copper-saving appliances indispensable to times of close margins and low percentages of mineral; but the assessment had hardly

been paid in when the quality of the rock began to fall off, and the lode finally ran out below the margin of profit. Exploration followed, and for this the proceeds of the assessment were the only available asset. What was not known to the public was that the surplus had been thus exhausted without success, and that the management had been quietly disposing of its interests preparatory to the announcement of a shutdown.

When Mr. Heald opened the telegram which was the cause of his return to town he expected to read that operations had been abandoned. But the message, which was in cipher, read : —

“Struck richest formation ever discovered. Rock runs better than Shawnee.”

The Shawnee was the adjoining property, and had been the foundation of great fortunes.

He had at once written two telegrams : one to his New York agent, directing him to inform the morning papers that for prudential reasons the mine would be temporarily shut down ; and one to his broker, ordering him to sell “short” to an unlimited amount on the decline which would inevitably follow such an announcement. When the stock touched bottom he intended to gather in the wreckage, publish the news of the unexpected discovery, and sit quietly down to reap the harvest.

Having dispatched this business with the assurance of a general who has the enemy in his grasp,

he went in search of Mabel, — from victory to defeat. In the elation of such unlooked-for good fortune defeat was bitter. But sitting in the cold gray light of the winter morning, as the train hurried through the still sleeping villages, he forgave her his defeat. She loved him! Defeat meant nothing. If he had been moved by the completeness and pitifulness of her confession, yet that was not the real reason for his forgiving mood. What she had uncovered in her own heart, if more than expected, had been hoped for. What she had uncovered in his was a revelation. *He* loved *her*. Not now for the things that had once attracted him, but for all these and vastly more, — the *why* which admits of no analysis or explanation, and which counts all reasons as nothing. The Mabel he saw now was not the Miss Temple of Gramercy Park, imperial with millions and beauty, who had fascinated him by her alternating moods of graciousness and disdain, but the woman of the night before, a woman at bay with her own contending passions, broken in spirit yet not abased, the Mabel whose every word of self-mastery and repulse was a surrender, infinitely desirable because of self-mastery and denial. Everything else was blotted out in the blinding light of this discovery, — he loved her! This was the supreme fact. Helen counted for nothing. He reckoned with her hardly more than with the public which would singe its

wings at the Argonaut candle. Both were incidents, not obstacles.

But as he sat thinking in the roar of the flying train while the sun came up over the Westford hills, one of these incidents became more and more an obstacle. It was not so easy to ignore Helen as it was to ignore the public. Of one thing he was sure, he did not wish to take either into his confidence for the present. As for returning to Cedar Hill, — well, he must wait and see.

What, after all, had he to complain of? He had forced an explanation with Mabel with the very result he had hoped for. But there was Helen again, — the glass of wine taken at the wrong moment. It was of no use wishing, regretting. What was done was done, and it was an infernal snarl.

The worst of it was that he felt the capacity, the desire, to be honest, to do something noble. It had always been a weakness of his, to make spasmodic excursions into the land of quixotic generosity and kindness. He had not cared a rap for the Bishop's church, and would have laughed at the praise the Bishop had awarded to his recognition of his obligations to society. But he had got a thousand dollars' worth of pleasure out of his subscription nevertheless, and that was what he made it for. Nor had he felt any very deep sense of indebtedness to Mr. Kensett for having once done him a good turn. The idea of repaying that debt

had come to him suddenly, in a sentimental mood, when sitting with Mrs. Kensett in the moonlit corner of a piazza one evening after dinner at Lenox. He did not care in the least for Mrs. Kensett. But, indulging in reminiscences, she had awakened this silly propensity of his for playing the rôle of Prince. It was silly, unmitigatedly silly. He had forgotten all about Mr. Kensett, and Mrs. Kensett was no more to him than the poor students of Lemington. She was not even poor. *She* had had no sentiment about disposing of her stock at a profit. There had been absolutely no reason for doing what he had, except that he liked to do such things. He had been sorry afterwards, and thoroughly glad to get out of it. These impulsive acts of benevolence really cost him nothing. They were only forms of self-indulgence, of vanity, for which one is always ready to pay any price. What he felt now was different. He wanted to please some one else, — Mabel. He had begun by admiring her, as he might have admired an exquisite object of art in a Fifth Avenue shop window. He had returned to look at it again, finally had gone in, and found it was not for sale. He had admired her still more in the train. Nerve and pluck and character always attracted him. She had vastly more than violet eyes and a pretty form. She had been attractive, she became fascinating and provocative, and now she was neces-

sary, — he loved her. Above all he wanted to be hers, to be her choice, to win her real love, to be to her eyes what she was to his as she sat in the chair under the palms of the conservatory, worth going through fire and flood for. And that was the worst of it! that, as often happens when we have found the will to dare fire and flood, there was no fire and flood to go through. To give her up was not within the bounds of reason. What good would that do? There are doors of life which, once shut, can never be opened again; steps which, once taken, can never be retraced. He had not closed any such door, or taken any such step. He began to hate Helen. What business had she to love him anyway!

He was roused by the porter's offer to brush his coat. The electric lights were on. They were already in the tunnel.

On leaving the station he crossed the street to a neighboring hotel and studied the tape carefully. Argonaut had opened at thirty-five, fallen to twenty, rallied to twenty-five, and then fallen again to twenty-one. It had closed the day before at thirty-eight. He went to the telephone and repeated his orders of the evening. Would he be down town to-day? No, he was going directly to the Carleton. If any one wanted to see him he was out of town.

A good many people wanted to see him, so the Carleton clerk told him.

“Well, I am not at home to any one,” he said. But just as he was stepping into the elevator a beardless boy of twenty with a white face caught him.

“Mr. Heald, Mr. Heald, — just a word, please.” He was trying to be off-hand. “What’s all this row about Argonaut? There’s an item in the morning paper. Is there any truth in it?”

Mr. Heald turned and looked at the speaker. He remembered to have seen him at the Club, but he could not recall his name or anything about him.

“Is there?” he said.

“Yes, about closing down.”

Mr. Heald thought a moment.

“I don’t own a share of Argonaut,” he said, stepping into the elevator. “If I did, I should sell it before I went to bed.”

XIX

THE sun was just struggling through the fog and smoke as Jack stepped into the launch lying off the Battery. But the great city had not waited for the sun. A hoarse blast of disdainful warning rose from a big black liner slowly making its way out of the North River to catch the morning tide. Angry shrieks came quick after the white puffs of steam from a half-score of tugboats, up betimes like the early bird after worms. A line of black scows buffeted low down in the water, sullen and obstinate, with the waves of the upper bay, smothered under a long trail of black smoke from the speck of power dragging them seaward. A weather-beaten tramp, with patches of red paint on its dingy sides and a strong list to starboard, its top gear glistening with tons of frozen spray and a vomit of yellow smoke pouring from its short funnel, was making for its berth under Brooklyn Heights after waiting at anchor overnight outside the bar. From under the Bridge, coming down the river at half-speed, a Sound boat, with its tier upon tier of deck and cabin, swept its great curve of foam, rocking the little boats at their dock moorings and

leaving behind a train of curling waves that dashed among the green piles and slapped against the iron plates of loading steamers. Ferryboats were coming and going in every direction, their cavernous decks black with people, like so many mouths of sea monsters which might at any moment close their ponderous jaws and disappear under the waves. Over the thin web of the great bridge long black lines were creeping like snails. The note of a bugle rang clear from Governor's Island. The clang of gongs on lower Broadway, the short whistle of engines in mid-air, the wail of a siren up the river, all the speech man has put into the dumb lips of Nature greeted the rising sun.

Before the east wind coming in fresh from the sea the smoke and steam from a thousand chimneys were hurrying away in curling ribbons of white and brown, and the waters of the bay were beginning to talk and show their white teeth.

"It's not going to blow, is it, Captain?" said Jack, buttoning up his fur coat and sitting down by the boiler to keep warm.

"No, sir, it's just a slant of morning wind, sir. It will warm up afore noon. Good day for a bit of painting, sir."

The engineer touched his lever, and with a shiver and throb the launch shot out from the landing into the wake of the liner.

"White Star, sir," said the captain.

Jack nodded. He knew every funnel in the merchant marine.

As the launch receded from the shore the separate noises of the city blended into a deep, confused roar, and a wonderful outline of towering piles stood out against the sky. Other cities have their messages, sad messages of lamentation over a perished splendor, sweet messages of tender recollection for fair women and brave men, sombre messages of vast populations toiling and sweating in the failing fight for supremacy, gay messages of laughter and of pride as from queens on thrones,—but the message of this one was the message of a young giant, half-grown, uncouth, insolent with the joy of its strength and an invincible faith in its destiny. Jack looked back upon its fading outlines with quiet pride. Not kings had chosen its seat or laid its foundations, nor princes set its stones one upon the other, but the brains and hands of such men as he.

He turned his face to the fresh wind with a keen sense of enjoyment. This was his day off. Were the truth told, he would have liked to don a pair of overalls and exchange places for a day with the workman sitting on his plank slung over the stern of the Vixen and dipping his brush in the pot of black paint. There was no strain in that work, covering stroke by stroke the glistening surface, stopping to listen to his neighbor at the other end

of the staging, slackening the rope for a fresh start below, — no perplexing problems to solve, no conflicting arguments to weigh, no instant decisions to make, no worry, and time enough to think, to think the thoughts he pleased. There was no wear and tear in painting or calking seams, no anxieties brought forward from the account of the day before.

The workman on the plank at two dollars a day thought the "old man" had a pretty comfortable berth.

"Two dollars a minute's about his gait," he said to his companion as Jack went up the ladder.

"Every man has his gait," was the reply; "all I want's a chance to strike mine."

"Guess you'll get it in this country if anywhere."

"That's so. I ain't whining."

The cabin was warm. A bright coal fire burned in the open grate. Everything was covered up for the winter and Mabel's piano was housed in oil-cloth, but the table was laid, and savory smells could be detected coming from the galley. Jack felt his sea appetite gaining ground. He went into his stateroom, got out an old suit and slouch hat from the locker, and lit his pipe. The morning went in talk and inspection, and luncheon time came in the midst of a discussion over the new awnings. The skipper thought the old ones would

do, but Jack said his daughter thought they were getting shabby. On this information the skipper immediately subsided.

Luncheon was scarcely over when, just as dessert was brought in, voices were heard on deck. The black cook, down for the day and serving also in the capacity of steward, went to the companion-way.

"Gentleman wants to see you, sir."

"To see me?" said Jack in a tone of surprise. As he spoke a man came down the steps, and Jack turned to see Mr. Brown, Jr., followed by the skipper.

"Good-morning, Mr. Temple."

"Hullo, Brown! where did you come from?"

"Arizona, sir. I got in this morning. They told me at the office I should find you here, so I took the ferry and came over in a boat."

"Sit down. What's up?"

"Well, sir, my report is ready. I put it in writing and thought you would wish me to deliver it to you personally." He took a long blue envelope from his inside pocket and laid it on the table. "But it is n't of much account now."

Jack put the envelope in his pocket. "Not of much account? Well, it does n't matter. I am not so much interested in Argonaut as I was awhile ago."

Mr. Brown fidgeted in his chair, but remained

silent. Jack looked at the skipper, who put on his hat and went out.

“Well?” said Jack, turning to Brown.

“That report,” said Mr. Brown, motioning to Mr. Temple’s pocket, “was finished three days ago, just as they were getting ready to shut down.”

“Not a very encouraging one, then.”

“No, sir. But before the ink was dry something happened.” Jack was feeling for his tobacco-pouch, and appeared disappointingly uninterested. “They struck the richest vein of conglomerate I ever laid my eyes on.”

“Bulldog luck!” said Jack, lighting his pipe.

“Yes, sir, for those who know it.”

Still Jack showed no interest. “Rather a difficult secret to keep, is n’t it, Brown?”

“There’ll be a good deal of cold water thrown on it before it’s allowed to blaze up, Mr. Temple. Have you seen the morning papers?”

“No, they are in my overcoat pocket.”

Mr. Brown unfolded one of his own and read the following paragraph:—

“‘It is stated on good authority that the mill on the Argonaut property will be closed for the present. No method seems to have been found to reduce the losses at the tail end of the mill, and present indications do not warrant the erection of a new one.’”

"It was the first thing I saw when I opened the paper," he said, "and it was about what I expected. I have n't lived with the Assistant Superintendent two weeks for nothing."

"I see. Tell me something about this new vein, Brown."

"It's the Shawnee vein, which they have been looking for these last six months, sir. There is a good mile of it, and it runs from ten to fifteen thousand feet in depth on the adjoining property. There is n't any doubt about it, Mr. Temple. You know what Shawnee has done for its owners. I wanted to throw my report in the waste-basket the moment I saw it. You know I have n't much cash, but I am going back to New York to buy every share I can borrow money to buy."

"You have n't had your luncheon yet, Brown?"

"No, sir."

"Better have a little something before you go," said Jack, touching the bell.

While Mr. Brown was dispatching his luncheon Jack went into his stateroom, wrote a few words in pencil, and going on deck ordered the launch alongside.

"You are not going yet, Mr. Temple?" asked the skipper.

"Oh no," replied Jack. "But pay the gentleman's boatman. I'll send him ashore in the launch. And, Captain," he added, giving him an envelope,

"you may go yourself. I want to send a telegram. I suppose you are in a hurry to be off," he said to Brown, as the latter came up the companionway.

"Did you come right through?"

"Yes, sir, without stopping."

"Well, get into the launch, it will save you half an hour."

"You are not going up yourself, Mr. Temple?"

"No. But I am alone to-night. You might come up after dinner, — say at nine o'clock."

"I will, sir," replied Mr. Brown, stepping into the launch.

"Always the way," growled the skipper, taking the wheel. "Never can get an hour to himself without some one a-bothering of him."

"I guess I did n't bother him much," remarked Brown. "That 's a telegram you have there, is n't it?"

The skipper nodded.

"I thought so," said Brown; and to himself, "He 'll make no mistake this time."

XX

THE gayety of the breakfast party at Cedar Hill on the morning of Mr. Heald's departure was marred by the arrival of Mr. Pearson with the information that an accident had occurred in the woods the day before. A woodcutter had been caught by a falling tree on the mountain side five miles away. He had been at work at some distance from his companions and had not been discovered till dusk, when his failure to appear had led to a search. With great difficulty he had been transported to Mr. Pearson's farm, where he had received such care as the local practitioner could give. The latter had decided that the crushed leg must be amputated, and Mr. Pearson had been sent to the nearest telephone to summon the assistance of the Lemington surgeon. He had also a list of articles necessary at the farmhouse, which he gave to Dolly while Paul was at the telephone.

"He 's a poor crittur," explained Mr. Pearson, "as has bin trampin' round after work. He ain't got no clothes to speak of, nor any friends, nor no name for that matter. Mrs. Pearson she 's that nervous she ain't no use. She allus did have

to go down to the village killin' days. Jim's bin for Mrs. Benton, but her baby's got the cramps a-teethin', and she says she ain't goin' to leave her baby for no tramps."

"Do you mean you want some one to go back with you?" asked Margaret, who had left the table with Dolly when Mr. Pearson's errand was known.

"Waal," replied Mr. Pearson, "the doctor said a woman would be sorter handy."

Margaret decided at once that she would go with Paul, who had ordered the sleigh. Dolly remonstrated, but to no purpose.

"You must stay and look after your guests," said Margaret. "Some one must take charge of the toboggan party," and she went upstairs for her hat and jacket.

"I shall ride over with Mr. Pearson," said Paul, who came in while Dolly was collecting the needed supplies, after Margaret had gone. "I have telephoned for a doctor and nurse. You can send the things over in the sleigh. If there is no need for me to stay I shall be back in an hour."

Dolly said nothing of Margaret's intention. She thought she would change her mind when she found Paul had gone. But Margaret was firm, and after getting together the articles on the doctor's list, Dolly went back to the breakfast-room.

Everybody was sorry, but as no one could do anything the interruption was momentary, and

Dolly made as light of it as she could. Mrs. Frazer, whose morning toilet was a momentous and protracted affair, never appeared at breakfast, and Mabel had slipped into Dolly's vacant place at the table and assumed charge. She was a little paler and more subdued than usual, like a person sobered by a sudden responsibility. She gave up her seat when Dolly reappeared, and moved into the chair beside her. The young attaché, who had thought her stunning the night before, endeavored, apropos of tobogganing, to interest her in "lugin" in Switzerland; but Mabel was abstracted, and he finally gave it up, especially as she insisted upon speaking in English, which was an effort for him.

When the talk flowed back into its natural channels, Mabel began to question Mrs. Kensett, who had not dismissed the subject so easily as the others, and who told her, under cover of the general conversation, what she had learned of the accident from Mr. Pearson, and of Margaret's determination. A little later when, after a momentary diversion, she turned to Mabel again, Mabel was gone.

She came out on the piazza just as the last parcel was being stowed away under the seat of the sleigh and the coachman was tucking the robe about Margaret.

"I am going with you," she said simply.

"There is not the slightest need of it, Miss Temple," objected Margaret, taken by surprise.

"I should like the ride. You don't mind?"

"Certainly not, but" —

"But what?" said Mabel, getting in and signing to the coachman to drive on.

She had passed a sleepless night. Neither she nor Helen had referred to the subject of their conversation before dinner. Helen did not know of Mr. Heald's departure. He had made his excuses quietly to Dolly, and his absence was remarked for the first time the following morning at breakfast, when Mabel listened to Dolly's explanation with affected surprise and polite indifference. From her state of exhilaration Helen had fallen into one of nervous uncertainty and apprehension. She endeavored to believe that she had herself only to blame. But the atmosphere had changed. Mr. Heald had danced with her twice before supper, but had given her no opportunity to relent. He was polite and friendly, that was all. He did not follow her, and she wanted to be followed. After supper he had disappeared. And then, when it was too late to put into execution any of the projects formed for lowering her flag, uncertainty and irresolution turned into fear. The whole subject seemed to have passed from Mabel's mind. She was kind, but uncommunicative, and Helen was too absorbed and, in the present unsatisfactory condition of her affairs, too anxious not to be probed to make conversation. All this Mabel knew. She understood

every silence and every word, every effort after the lights were out to feign sleep, and, after sleep came, every restless movement, — herself too numb with the certainty of her knowledge for restlessness.

One night, in the early winter, she had seen with her father a French play, in which, of two women, one had to efface herself. She remembered every detail distinctly. Jack, in his imperfect comprehension of French, had sat placidly through the five acts, and had seen unconcernedly the woman who was in the way solve her problem with a few tiny drops of poison. Lying motionless through that long unending night, her wide open eyes staring into the dark, Mabel recalled how, in her scorn for the melodramatic, the tragedy on the stage had seemed to her almost ludicrous. Both these women were lovesick fools. It would have been so easy for either to cease caring for that stage lover, to stop whimpering, and walk out of their troubles into the wide world and forgetfulness. Then, too, to die was so stupid, so useless, so cowardly. Better a thousand times to take the joy, if it *was* a joy, bravely, and pay the cost, without making such a fuss about it. And now the one persistent thought which came back to her again and again was the thought of this stage fool, — that she was in the way, that there was no going on, no retreating, that she must disappear.

She dropped into sleep once, the half-sleep of the

body, in which the reluctant brain refuses to share, and thought she was at the piano struggling with one of Chopin's nocturnes. Her music teacher was saying: "Put more feeling into that passage, Miss Mabel, — *expressivo, con passione.*" She woke trying hard to comply, with a little bitter cry.

At last it had come, — passion, love! and it was not the sentimental, ridiculous emotion which had often excited her pity or scorn, nor the artificial storm of the stage, after whose passage audience and actors had tranquilly adjourned to supper; but something real, vital, revealing with the ruthless energy of a volcano the slumbering forces of sex. The stranger in her house of life had announced himself, and was master. Once she had looked into his face every tendency to trifle had vanished.

The promise she had given to Helen did not count for a feather's weight. It was made before she *knew*. In a desperate moment — a moment when she stood on the brink of a precipice, one look into which told her she no more belonged to herself — she had thrust it between herself and *him*, as a shield to keep him at bay. She had promised Helen that if Mr. Heald loved her she would be the first to rejoice. He did not love her. She was bound to nothing, she was free. Why then had she pretended she was not? Not from any idea of self-abnegation, or duty. She was not in the habit of looking at things from that point

of view. It was not a question of principle, but of pure feeling, of what she preferred. If she should stand again on the brink of that happiness, she would take it. And she would stand there inevitably. He would not have it otherwise, and she could not wish him to. She understood that woman in the play now, who disappeared not because it would do any good, but because it was the easiest thing to do. In anguish death may be the line of least resistance.

She began to think of her mother. If any one had ever dared to criticise Gladys, she would have defended her from pride. But she had always cherished secretly a little bitterness, as if a disgrace had fallen upon her through Gladys's fault. Now she understood. How she loved her, longed for her arms, her comprehension! Jack had always seemed to understand her best. But it was for her mother now she yearned, the mother she had discovered in herself, not for Jack's indulgence. And when at last exhaustion came to shut her eyes, it was in Gladys's arms she fell asleep with two shining tears upon her cheeks.

Her sleep was heavy and long. Helen, who had always been an early riser, was dressed and gone when she opened her eyes and saw Marie preparing her bath. There was a letter from her papa, the usual daily half-page she received when absent from home. It contained nothing important, and,

like a regular money allowance, had become so entirely a matter of course that it had ceased to make any impression. Underneath Jack's envelope was another. The handwriting was not familiar, but she knew at once whose it was. Marie had learned never to offer explanations not asked for, and was never quite sure of the attitude she ought to assume until she had received her cue. She was ready to explain why the note bore no postmark if she were asked, but Mabel did not question her. She read it unconcernedly, Marie thought, as she had read Jack's. It hardly seemed worth the half-eagle in Marie's pocket. But after her mistress went into the bath-room Marie observed that both letters were gone, and that when Mabel went down to breakfast only Jack's was in the scrap-basket. It might be worth the half-eagle after all. She certainly would have thought so had she known it lay under the folds of the blue satin waist when Mabel stepped into the sleigh beside Margaret; although but once read it was known by heart.

“Dearest, — I am not worthy of you, but love atones for everything, and I love you with all my soul and strength. And love has come to you, dear, — not too late, nor in vain. Think! if need were how I should fly to you! If the need came to me, would any barrier keep you away? Wait — do not blame yourself — wait, as I shall wait — a little while — forever, if need be.”

Paul was surprised to see Margaret and annoyed at the presence of Mabel. It was like Margaret to come forward in an emergency. He was proud of her. But Mabel! what was she doing here in her blue satin waist and French hat! He hardly noticed her as he helped Margaret out and assisted in the transfer of the packages to the house.

Mabel was silent and asked no questions.

The sleigh was at the wide stone step before the door, and she could hear enough of the low conversation between Paul and Margaret just within to understand the condition of affairs. The doctor had decided that if life was to be saved the operation must be performed without further delay. He must do the best he could with Paul's aid. Margaret bravely offered to stay, but Paul would not hear of it. The doctor agreed with him. Whatever her courage, she might prove worse than useless; it was better that she should go at once for Mrs. Benton and take charge of her sick child. Jim could drive her over in Mr. Pearson's sleigh and bring Mrs. Benton back.

There was not a moment to lose, and Margaret set out immediately.

"Margaret is going over for Mrs. Benton," Paul explained to Mabel, "and will stay with her sick baby till the nurse from Lemington comes. You can drive Miss Temple home, James," he said to the coachman, "and then return for me. Tell Mrs. Kensett I shall be back as soon as possible."

“Don’t you think it would be well for James to remain here until the other sleigh returns?” said Mabel; “you might need him.”

“Perhaps so,” replied Paul. It was what he would have done had Mabel not been there. He wanted to get rid of her.

“You need not mind me, I will sit here,” she said.

“Very well,” acquiesced Paul, disappearing in the house.

The minutes dragged by. The doctor had made all his preparations. He came to the door for the last time with Paul to listen for the sound of bells.

“We must manage by ourselves,” he said, “and do the best we can. If we only had some one to administer the ether” — Then they went in and the door closed.

As they passed from the kitchen, which served all purposes in Mr. Pearson’s ménage, into the adjoining bedroom a voice said, —

“I will do that.”

The two men turned and saw Mabel standing in the doorway taking off her dogskin gloves. The doctor was a quiet man, of few words, and he was looking meditatively into the pale, resolute face confronting him.

“You need not fear for me,” said Mabel, answering his look and removing her hat.

"I knew she could do it the moment I heard her speak and looked into her eyes," the doctor said to the Lemington surgeon an hour later when the latter was driving away.

"That 's my experience," was the reply. "Blood and education always tell."

"You are a brave girl and you have helped save a life," he said to Mabel, as he put her in the sleigh beside Paul.

She smiled faintly. Her face was white and she was trembling. The doctor had given her a drink of something before starting. She did not know what it was, but it steadied her, and the fresh air against her cheeks was refreshing. Yet it was all she could do to hold herself straight. Waves of nausea and dizziness made her hold fast to the robe. She felt that if she let go, or leaned back against the cushion, she would sink into the nothingness lying in wait for her. The consciousness that Paul was watching her as she swayed to the motion of the sleigh, though it was the watchfulness of solicitude, gave her the fictitious strength of pride. His voice sounded far away. She knew that it was kind, that he was praising her and saying pleasant things, but she counted every tree and bush as they hurried by.

Mrs. Frazer saw them as they drove up the avenue, and was at the door.

"Where is Margaret?" she exclaimed.

“I am going for her now,” said Paul, helping Mabel out. “Take Miss Temple to her room.”

“What has happened, dear?” Mabel’s pale face frightened her.

“Nothing,” said Mabel. But the question was too much for her. A horrible odor of ether swept over her, and she pitched forward into Mrs. Frazer’s arms.

XXI

THE Lemington surgeon, intercepted on his way to the station, stood at Mabel's bedside when she opened her eyes. He was smiling and saying she would be all right in an hour or two. For a moment she did not know where she was or what had happened. She tried to speak, and made an effort to sit up, but her limbs were like lead and her words incoherent. Then she remembered everything up to the moment when her feet touched the piazza. The rest was a blank, and she lay still, endeavoring to fill up the gap of unconsciousness and to get back to the point where her life seemed to have snapped off short.

The window opposite the bed was wide open, and Mrs. Frazer was sitting beside her, holding her hand. She saw Marie helping the doctor on with his coat. She heard him say something to Mrs. Frazer in a low voice, and then he came and touched her forehead soothingly with his hand.

"You will be yourself again in a little while, and a brave little self it is," he said, stroking her hair. He looked as if he were going to kiss her, and she shrank back; but it was only a professional caress, and he turned to go.

She felt her strength coming back fast, but she had not yet succeeded in tying the ends of the broken thread.

“Where am I? May I get up?” she said.

“You may do anything you wish,” said the doctor at the door.

Marie had placed another pillow under her head.

“How perfectly silly I was! what did I do?”

“Mercy! child,” exclaimed Mrs. Frazer, “more than I could.”

“Don’t speak of that, please;” she remembered now: “did I faint? I recollect feeling so queer.”

“It was quite my fault,” said Mrs. Frazer; “I should not have asked you that question. I fainted myself once on less provocation. We had been to the theatre and I got terribly wrought up. I was trembling all the way to the restaurant where we went for supper. Mr. Frazer asked me if I would have peas or asparagus tips with the pheasants, and I fainted dead away. It was the last straw.”

Mabel smiled faintly.

“What made you run off on such dreadful business? We looked everywhere for you, until Marie told us you had gone with Margaret.”

She did not know herself why she had gone. She had wanted to do something, anything, — she remembered that. All the rest was unforeseen and as if some one had pushed her on without any volition of her own. Now it was pleasant to lie still, with

all that had troubled her dulled and softened by the lassitude and weakness.

"Where is Mrs. Kensett?" she asked at length.

"They have not returned yet. Will you take a swallow of this beef tea now?"

She was feeling better every minute.

"I wish you would not say anything about this, Mrs. Frazer. I think I can go down to luncheon."

"You may go down to dinner, but not to luncheon. You have had your own way quite enough for the present. I shall allow no one to see you till tea-time, and you must lie perfectly quiet till I return. I am going to prepare some arrowroot and port wine for you, and if you are good you shall have it in my silver porringer."

Mabel smiled and acquiesced, finding a new pleasure in obedience.

After Mrs. Frazer had gone she remembered the note she had fastened under her waist, and sitting up glanced about the room. Her watch was on the dressing-table and the note lay underneath it. On a chair by the window hung her blue satin waist.

"Take it away," she said to Marie; "burn it,—I never want to see it again. And bring me my watch, the mirror, and my comb."

In taking the watch from the table Marie touched the letter.

"Put it in the fire," said Mabel. She could see

the grate in the parlor through the open door, and watched Marie fulfill her instructions. "Now shut the window."

"You did look like a dead person, Miss Mabel," said Marie, who had been waiting for her chance to talk. "I was that frightened" —

"Don't speak to me about it, Marie. I look like a ghost now" — laying down the glass. "I told you to take that waist away. I can smell it from here. I will ring if I want you. Perhaps I can sleep."

There were three persons — Margaret, Helen, and Dolly — who after hearing the recital of Mabel's morning adventures wished to go to her at once. But Mrs. Frazer held all three at bay. Not hearing Mabel's bell, and having gently opened her door and found her asleep, she posted Marie in the corridor and prescribed silence for the entire household.

"She is an extraordinary girl," she said to Dolly, as they sat together after luncheon waiting for Mabel to wake; "most extraordinary, — but badly brought up, very badly. A man with an only daughter always plays the fool."

"I suppose he feels as I do when I see the gardener among the rose-bushes in spring," Dolly answered, reflecting, without mentioning Jack's name; "it makes me shudder, the way he hacks and cuts."

"It's either that or no roses," retorted Mrs. Frazer.

"What did Paul say?" Dolly asked after a pause. She wished to know all the details.

"That she was cooler than he was. He said she might have been made of ice, or stone. But she is not."

"She seems to have quite won your heart, Laurinda."

"Well, is n't that the way to win hers? You must have a little patience. She is very observant and very sensitive. I am very sure one false step would ruin everything. Above all, don't dig up her heart to see if the seeds are sprouting."

Mabel loved praise, but she wanted none of that which was waiting for her. She would not allow Helen to speak of the morning occurrences, and she begged Dolly to ask the others not to allude to them. She was quite herself again by tea-time, and wrote a letter to Jack in which she made no reference to the accident. For Margaret, with whom she had not been particularly sympathetic, she displayed a fondness as unexpected as it was sudden. Dolly herself felt nearer to her, though uncertain whether she or Mabel was the magnet. Mrs. Frazer especially she clung to, but she did not want to be left alone a moment with Helen. Everything connected with her familiar personality, from the rising inflections of her voice to the pose of her

head when brushing her hair, was insupportable. The aversion was so unconquerable that she inquired of Mrs. Kensett if she might sleep in a room by herself that night.

"Would it be convenient, and not too much trouble?" she asked. Dolly thought the wish a very natural one, and Paul was hurriedly moved into the wing, Mabel's possessions being transferred by Marie during dinner.

"I hope you don't think I am unreasonable. I am sorry to make such a commotion," she said to Paul when she learned she was the cause of his removal.

Paul thought it quite natural too.

"You need not be," he replied. "I don't wonder you are shaken up. I can camp anywhere." He was ready to do anything for her.

Mrs. Frazer's face wore a grim smile on hearing of these arrangements. "That girl came into a house of sworn enemies yesterday," she remarked in conversation with herself. "To-morrow she will rule them all, and they will not know it." This aloud — and to herself, "Fortunately I am here."

XXII

No one was more surprised by Mabel's exploit than Helen, and nothing connected with it surprised her more than Mabel's aversion to any allusion to it. Every direct reference to what had taken place at the farm was suppressed at once. Not that Helen had any desire to talk about it. She quite understood that after such an experience one would not care to revive its details. She had no morbid curiosity about them whatever. But she did feel a genuine admiration and the craving to express it, if only indirectly, by little acts of thoughtfulness and attention. She had an extra "dear" ready on her lips whenever she uttered Mabel's name. Moreover, what Mabel had said of Mr. Heald had been an immense relief, and had set flowing a well-spring of gratitude. Mabel was not to blame for his desertion. But while not absolutely rejecting these offerings, Mabel gave no sign of recognizing their significance. A very little sign would have been enough.

Helen put this down to capriciousness, to that inconsistency which had always baffled her, and which even now left her uncertain whether she was

facing a new revelation of character or an old-time exhibition of impulse. Mabel had never been deceitful, although often artful. She did and said unexpected and perplexing things, but she had never resorted to lying, even as a little girl. So far as Mr. Heald was concerned, Helen believed her implicitly, — which was not difficult, for she wanted to, — and had not the slightest idea that the attitude which she ascribed to caprice or indifference was an heroic effort to conquer an absolute repulsion.

She made some futile attempts to break through Mabel's wall of resistance, and finally, finding to her surprise that the lane had no turning, began to suspect that there was something more than caprice behind Mabel's manner, and lapsed again into irresolution and timidity. She had abdicated authority so long ago that as a weapon it was too rusty from disuse even for defensive purposes. Affection was equally unavailing.

With one exception Mabel neither did nor said anything tangible enough for open complaint, but her behavior made Helen vaguely uncomfortable. She was sure it was deliberate, not accidental, and that it was directed only against herself. She was equally sure no one else noticed it, and this made her still more uncomfortable. When we see ghosts we do not like to be told we are dreaming.

The one exception was of so utterly unreason-

able a nature that it completely upset her. Mabel had come down to dinner, charming, but with superb unconcern. The evening had been passed in the discussion and arrangement of some charades for the following day. Everybody was happy, so it seemed to Helen, except herself. She was not self-reliant, and she felt alone. That Mr. Heald should be called away on business she told herself was entirely natural, and she struggled against the dull sense of desertion in her heart which her head pronounced utterly unjustifiable. Gramercy Park, while not estranging her from the Gaunt household, had made her life independent of it. When in college, and even afterwards when she had left the Boston nest for her flight to the New York boarding-school, she had taken all her trials and ambitions to the home council. But home and Gramercy Park belonged to different worlds. Together with a certain elation over her success went a certain disapproval of her new sphere which had gradually restricted confidences. Communications with the Boston home had grown less and less frequent, and in spite of her original pride in its modest respectability and dignity, it was so entirely ignored by Gramercy Park that with her expanding horizons she too had come to regard it as a far-away and unimportant factor. Just now, when there was no one to turn to in her new world, she realized keenly the loss of her old

one. The family in Boston would have been immensely pleased by a successful marriage. It did not require much imagination to hear her mother tell her friends about it, or to see the little vanities to which such an event would give rise. On the other hand, disappointment or disaster incurred in the upper ether would, she knew, elicit a mournful chorus of "I told you so" and "I was always afraid" from the lower level. She had been lured away from the respectable commonplace into a frame of mind which would lead her now to open revolt against its displeasure.

She was in this restless and unhappy state when she slipped away from the drawing-room into the conservatory for a moment with herself. She sat down in the big chair under the palms, staring beyond the orchids at her problem with an aching heart. Would it have been better after all if she had never parted from the functions?

And just then Mabel came through the door, — Mabel, vastly more unhappy still, who in that chair had touched her lips to the cup of supreme happiness, and who could not overcome the longing for one more draught, though it were only the phantom one of recollection, — who had stolen away to sit for one second in that chair, *her* chair, to shut her eyes and give herself once more.

"What are you doing here!"

Helen sprang to her feet. She had never seen

Mabel angry before. Vexed, petulant, yes, — a hundred times, but not like this, with hate in her eyes.

It was only for a second, like a flash of summer lightning, but it left her dazed.

“They want you in the drawing-room,” said Mabel coldly, leading the way back.

Helen followed her, stunned and speechless. The outburst was so unaccountable that she could not frame an idea into words. If there had been time before reaching the door she would have forced an understanding, but courage and self-possession came too late, and she was in the drawing-room again before she had recovered her self-control. Mabel had joined the first group she had met, and was already discussing animatedly the choice of a subject for a tableau proposed by the Bishop, who, at Dolly’s invitation, was now regularly relieving the tedium of Lemington by passing his evenings at Cedar Hill. It seems that the theme of his next sermon had suggested the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins as admirably suited to afford amusement combined with instruction. By common consent Mabel had been selected to represent the Foolish Virgin, and had turned the conversation from costumes to ethics by declaring that her wise sister in the parable had been abominably selfish. Helen stood listening, hot with indignation. She resented with all her soul

the tranquil ease with which Mabel slipped, as from one garment into another, from one emotion to its opposite. She felt humiliated and outraged. If it had been any one but Mabel she would have found some excuse for dragging her back into the conservatory and demanding an explanation. It was always so with Helen, — to think she would do what she flinched at, if circumstances and persons were not what they were.

“I don’t care,” Mabel was saying to the Bishop, “she ought to have given her some of her oil.”

“But my dear young lady,” urged the Bishop, “think of the facts. I can well imagine how your father would state them. Let us suppose two men who have notes to pay on a certain day. One, by self-denial, by economy, by the hard surrender of his rightful pleasures to the claims of duty, is ready on the appointed day to meet his obligations. The other, thoughtless of his creditor’s claims, heedless of the future, abandons himself to self-indulgence, and only when confronted by ruin hastens to borrow of his prudent neighbor. Remember it is not a question of generosity. *There is not enough oil for both lamps.*”

The Bishop concluded in triumphant complacency.

“I admire your logic,” retorted Mabel, “but she ought to have given her some, — and I despise her!”

The Bishop joined in the general laugh with the

indulgent smile of a man who sees the folly of serious argument with a child, and the conversation went back to costumes.

Helen crossed over and sat down by Margaret. She was resolved to see Mabel at bedtime, yet was relieved when, meeting Marie on the way to her room, she was told Mabel was already asleep. It happened that this was not true, but Marie was not to be blamed for carrying out her instructions.

Mrs. Frazer had sat with Dolly for a while after the company broke up. They talked of the events of the day, they spoke of Mabel, but tacitly avoided the subject of which they were both thinking. Dolly had been impressed by Mrs. Frazer's warning that she must make no mistakes. Her path did not appear to be quite so clear as at first. She was waiting, not a little perplexed, and conscious that her perplexity was shared. So true was this that Mrs. Frazer, who had intended to go to New York for a day to complete a transaction which had occasioned her previous visit, had given up the journey under the conviction that something was going to happen, that her hand was on the ship's helm, and that she must not abandon her post. She had announced her determination to deed the old home in New York to Margaret. Paul had remonstrated. He was entirely able to provide for Margaret. The war was likely to come to an end in the spring, when they would be married, and he should take

her back with him to Pretoria. Her mother ought to keep the home for her declining years. He did not say this in so many words, but Mrs. Frazer showed that she divined his thought by declaring that she had no need of ten rooms to die in. With business-like dispatch she had made out a power of attorney and packed Paul off in the afternoon train, much against his will, to make the transfer. It was to be a surprise for Margaret on her coming birthday, — “in more senses than one,” said Mrs. Frazer, “for she thinks me a selfish old woman. So I am. I do as I please.”

Having talked with Dolly about everything except what they had at heart, she went to her room for the game of solitaire without which she never went to bed, and, after several defeats and successive resolves not to try again, was laying out the cards for one more game when some one knocked at her door. It was Mabel's maid.

“If you please,” said Marie, “Miss Temple would like to speak with you.”

Mrs. Frazer laid down her cards as tranquilly as if she had been waiting for this very message. In reality she was much perturbed. The lights in the corridor were out, and Marie led the way with her candle. On reaching Mabel's room Mrs. Frazer took it from her hand without a word and went in, closing the door behind her, and leaving Marie in a state of poignant curiosity in the dark.

"Are you ill?" she asked, setting the candle on the table and bending over the bed.

"No, I wanted to speak to you."

Mrs. Frazer drew a chair to the bedside and sat down. An unwonted tenderness took possession of her. This was not the Mabel she had seen an hour ago in evening dress, but a child afraid of being left alone in the dark. Margaret, whom she really loved, had never crept in this way into her heart. It even embarrassed her a little to find that having begun with the desire to give Mabel a good shaking she could scarcely restrain herself now from taking her in her arms.

"You don't mind sitting here a little while, do you?"

"No, dear, I am very glad to." She did not know what else to say.

"I have been thinking of mamma," said Mabel. "That was all."

Mrs. Frazer took one of the hands lying on the coverlid and pressed it gently.

"You have had a great shock to-day. To-morrow you will feel better."

"Yes," said Mabel.

She said yes, not in assent, but absent-mindedly, as if it were not worth while to contradict. Mrs. Frazer looked at the face on the pillow with awakening alarm. Was she really ill, or was it the shadows from the candle?

"Mabel, my child, you are not deceiving me? You are not ill?"

"I love to have you call me 'my child.' No, really, I am quite well." And then, after a pause, "I wish mamma were alive."

Mrs. Frazer stooped and kissed her.

Mabel smiled faintly. "You were very good to come. Marie read to me a little while, — and then I wanted mamma to come and tell me a story" —

"As she used to when you were a child."

"No. I don't think she ever did. I was just imagining it."

"You must not imagine such things," said Mrs. Frazer abruptly. "You are nervous, and do not know what you want." It was not a very sympathetic answer, and she was aware of it, but the tears were close to her eyes.

"Oh yes I do," replied Mabel quietly.

"You want a good sleep, that's what you want. You are unstrung. A night's rest will put you all right."

"Yes, a good rest," assented Mabel.

Mrs. Frazer longed to ask what was troubling her. She was convinced that there was something besides the morning's episode. She thought of Dolly, but Dolly's grievance, which was in her mind when she followed Marie down the corridor, was quite inadequate to explain Mabel's condition.

Mabel saw her perplexity and sat up in bed.

"Now kiss me good-night, dear Mrs. Frazer. I am not ready to talk about myself. If I ever am it will be to you." She took Mrs. Frazer's hand in her own, making that lady feel that she was the one to be comforted. "You won't think me silly, will you? I can see that you don't. You are so good not to ask questions. I should not like you if you did." She put up her face to be kissed again. "A good sleep will not make everything right, Mrs. Frazer" —

"But my dear child," interrupted Mrs. Frazer, embracing her. The tears were in her eyes now, but Mabel's were dry and shining.

"I don't like pretending. I wanted my own mamma, — she would understand. I felt as if I *must* have her. That is why I sent for you. I know I shall be very different to-morrow. But you must not let that make you forget to-night. And do not tell Mrs. Kensett what a troublesome guest she has. I am just upset, that's all, — just upset," she repeated in a mechanical way, smiling again. "I want to tell you everything, but something says it would do no good. I think I love you," she said, with a real smile at last. "If you will love me a little that will be enough. I never knew I should want to be loved." She looked up with a shy expression on her face, and Mrs. Frazer, completely conquered, threw her arms about her.

“You will be a good girl now and go to sleep,” she said, laying her back on the pillow.

“Yes.”

“And think of nothing.”

“Yes.”

“You promise me?”

“Yes.”

Then she kissed her again, astonished at the sweetness of the caress, and, lest the tears should fall from her eyes on the smiling face, seized her candle and hurried away without even saying good-night.

XXIII

AT the close of the first day's decline in Argonaut Mr. Heald had illustrated to his satisfaction the paradox of making money by selling what he did not have. It had become known to the interested through those mysterious channels which supply the public with information that he had sold his holdings and was out of the market. The financial columns of the evening papers contained no comment upon so insignificant an eddy on the broad stream of general prosperity, and the shrinkage of the Argonaut bubble was scarcely noticed outside the circle of its victims. The statement that the mine had shut down was confirmed, however, the following morning. Paul, having executed Mrs. Frazer's commission, was lunching down town when an item to this effect caught his eye. He turned to the stock list and saw the shares were quoted at two! Margaret and Dolly were safe, but the escape was so narrow that his indignation against Mr. Heald rose to fever heat. He was looking at his watch to see how much time he had before the afternoon train for Westford, and had just determined to run in and see Jack a moment on his way

to the Elevated station, when the drawing of a cork at a table in the corner near him attracted his attention. He recognized Mr. Heald at once, and he further remembered now where he had seen him before. It needed just that fixed gaze at nothing to carry him back to an evening in Johannesburg when the turn of a card in the Colony Club set a man staring with the same fixed stare, as though the crowded room was empty and its silence the silence of the desert.

Mr. Heald had had an exciting morning. On the confirmation of the rumored closing of the mine, Argonaut shares had opened weak at twelve, and the rout of timid holders became complete. The price fell to two before noon, then rallied to five on strong buying, from what source and for what reason was not apparent. He was still on the short side when he received a message from his broker that offerings had practically ceased, and that that particular pulse indicated on the floor of the Exchange by the word "Miscellaneous" was lifeless. He then had contracts for the delivery of ten thousand shares, but he was not especially disturbed. There was no leakage of news from Arizona. The secret of the discovery had been well kept, there was no reason for any advance, and it would require a very material rise to offset his winnings. Then came sudden and complete stagnation. After ransacking every corner in an unavailing

effort to cover, he had succeeded in picking up only a few hundred shares, and realized that he had over-reached himself. Inquiry developed the additional fact that the principal buying had been by a brokerage firm to which he was bound to deliver eight thousand shares before the closing hour. He asked at once for a conference with a view to settlement, and was informed by the broker that it would be necessary to consult his principal.

Who was his principal?

There was a hurried conversation over the telephone.

The principal was Mr. Temple.

Could he see Mr. Temple?

There was another consultation over the telephone.

Yes, Mr. Temple would see Mr. Heald at two o'clock.

It was then one. He had an hour to think it over. He was not yet anxious, only annoyed. Eight thousand shares at five was forty thousand dollars. Say ten even, — that was only eighty thousand, nothing to worry over. The whole transaction was insignificant as compared with Mabel. It cost him relatively little to part with money, but there were mistakes for which money could not atone. If he could only settle with Helen to Mabel's satisfaction as easily as he hoped to with Jack Temple!

He had ordered a small steak and a pint bottle of champagne and was spreading his napkin over his knee when he looked up and saw Paul approaching. There was a set expression on Paul's face which betokened anything but amiability, but Mr. Heald smiled pleasantly. He had been thinking of Mabel, and the thought of her would have made him gentle with his worst enemy.

Paul was still wrestling with his indignation. He was asking himself what the devil could induce a man to palm off worthless stocks on trusting women, and on seeing Mr. Heald he impulsively resolved to know.

"Do you object to my asking you a few questions?" he said abruptly.

Neither had exchanged a word after the first glance of recognition, and Paul was standing by the table with his hat and cane in his hand.

"Not in the least," replied Mr. Heald affably. "Sit down. You will let me go on with my luncheon? I have an appointment at two o'clock."

"You were in Johannesburg four years ago, I think," said Paul.

"Yes, four years ago this month, in December."

"I remember your losing five thousand pounds one evening at the Colony Club."

"More than that," said Mr. Heald tranquilly.

"Yes. You staked your cattle range — on the

Bex River, in the Colony, was n't it? — and lost that too." Mr. Heald nodded assent.

"And left the room a beggar."

"Not quite so bad as that," said Mr. Heald, filling his glass. "I had a few pounds. I happen to recollect because they were so few."

Paul softened a little at the absence of resistance.

"I beg your pardon for recalling unpleasant facts" —

"Not at all, not at all," interrupted Mr. Heald. "I believe I made no complaint at the time, and am not likely to now. But you are telling me what you know. What is it you *don't* know?"

"I don't know how, if you were in Johannesburg in '98, you could have been intimately associated with Cecil Kensett, who never set foot in Africa and died in '99," blurted out Paul.

"Intimately associated?" repeated Mr. Heald.

"So you said to my cousin when you put sixty-five thousand dollars of hers into Argonaut."

"I believe I did. Well, I should n't have said so if it were not true. Now let me ask *you* a question. Are you speaking for Mrs. Kensett?"

"No."

"She has no reason to complain of her investment in Argonaut, I think?"

"She has n't you to thank for that."

"No?" said Mr. Heald, pushing away his plate

and with both arms on the table looking into Paul's face.

"Because fortunately she acted under other advice," continued Paul, "and got out of her investment, as you call it, in time."

"As I call it? Now look here, Mr. Graham, I take you to be a man who would apologize if he were on the wrong track. Otherwise" — He stopped and smiled.

"Yes," said Paul, returning the steady gaze, "I would. You need n't answer my questions if they embarrass you. It's past history. I ask because I don't understand how a man can" —

"You don't understand because you don't know. I advised Mrs. Kensett to get rid of her Argonaut the very day she sold it. Evidently that's one thing you did n't know," said Mr. Heald, observing Paul's surprise. "And I advised her to buy it because I had faith in it. It is n't necessary to tell you how much I have made out of that mine myself. That's my affair. Now I suppose you want to know why I put your cousin in it. That's my affair too. But I don't mind telling you. I was dead broke when I left the Cape. I had just enough cash to get to England, and had to take a steerage passage to New York. Mr. Kensett sailed from Liverpool on the same steamer. Perhaps I did strain the meaning of words a little when I said we were associated in a business enter-

prise. The fact is he lent me five hundred dollars on the strength of a chance conversation one day off the Banks when he was talking with the emigrants. Did you ever borrow money yourself? It's a common business transaction, is n't it? Borrowing now means paying later. I think I paid my debt. What did Mrs. Kensett sell her Argonaut for? About ninety thousand? I did n't care to go into the steerage details at a Lenox house party. Of course I gave my note to Mr. Kensett. Probably he did not take it very seriously. I never saw it again, — nor him. He was dead when I came back from the West. But I always had a bit of sentiment about that note." He stopped and laughed. "I wish it was the only paper my name was on."

Paul was a little ashamed of his hasty generalizations, yet did not feel at all like apologizing for them. As things had turned out there was nothing at which he could cavil. There was even something taking about the cool assurance and easy frankness of the man. But at the bottom of it all was the fact that for some not very definite reason he did not like him. It is unpleasant to distrust without knowing why. He was not one to refuse to shake hands with a man because he did not know who his grandfather was. If Mr. Heald had shown in any way that he regarded an apology as due him it would have been easier to offer it. His manner,

however, put Paul on quite a different footing, — merely the footing of one whose attack had been parried. Mr. Heald seemed entirely content with that result and careless of any further questions of honor or injustice involved. He had certainly made some very frank personal statements, but Paul did not know him any better than before. He had noticed that everybody spoke of him as “Mr. Heald.” No one appeared to have got so far as “Heald,” or “Reginald,” as a form of address.

“Are you going back to Cedar Hill to-night?”

“Yes, right away,” replied Paul, glad of the change of topic.

“I wish you would tell your cousin how badly I feel about running away so unceremoniously. I will write to-night, after I get some matters straightened out here. How did the tobogganing come off?”

“I really don’t know,” said Paul. “We had an accident” —

“An accident?” interrupted Mr. Heald.

Paul gave a brief account of it and of the part played by Mabel.

“The girl’s nerve quite surprised us,” he said.

Mr. Heald appeared uninterested and the conversation lagged.

“You must excuse me,” he said, rising; “I have an appointment with Miss Temple’s father

for two o'clock, and it is ten minutes of that now." They shook hands, with some constraint on Paul's side, and parted. There was time enough to spare before the Westford train started, and Paul's intention to see Jack before leaving was confirmed. He wanted to tell him about Mabel, and he wondered too what Mr. Heald's business with Jack could be.

If any of the throng which caught a glimpse of Mr. Heald's face as he hurried along lower Broadway during the closing hour of the business day had known his errand they would have said he was weighing the chances of a favorable settlement. But his thoughts were not busy with the price of Argonaut shares. "Just like her, just like her," he kept saying to himself.

Unfortunately the thought of Mabel was so indissolubly connected with that of Helen that it was impossible for him to see one face — as he had seen it every hour since leaving Cedar Hill — without being confronted with the other. He could forget and ignore Helen if Mabel could. He loved Mabel the more because she could not, though he would have had no scruples whatever if she had had none. Mabel was both his desire and his stumbling-block. Yet he had no word of blame for her. She was all the dearer for her loyalty. He knew persuasion and argument would be futile with her, that she would scorn him for resorting to

them. In the vain attempt to find some way out of his own folly he had thought of a direct appeal to Helen. The humiliation involved in such a confession was nothing to him, and there could be no doubt of its result. But what would Mabel think of it? Only that thought held him back. He was experiencing the new sensation of wishing to submit his every act to her judgment and approval. *She* had scruples and a conscience, and he had more respect for them than for his own.

The boy at the outer door took his card and disappeared down the vista of iron-guarded desks into the private office. Jack looked up as his visitor entered with "Just a moment, Mr. Heald," finished a signature for which a clerk was waiting, and when the door closed wheeled round in his chair. "They told me you wished to see me," he said.

Mr. Heald took the seat beside the desk and looked steadily into the speaker's face. He had an impression that Mr. Temple did not like him. It was not a hard face, but it wore its business mask. If he had thought of it as the face of Mabel's father that thought vanished the moment it turned toward him.

"You know, of course, the reason why I wished to see you," he said.

"I suppose so," replied Jack laconically.

"I have a delivery of something like eight thou-

sand Argonaut to make before three o'clock. They are not to be had, as you know. I want your price of settlement."

"What do *you* think they are worth, Mr. Heald?"

"The last sale was at five. I thought them worth that then."

"Well, what do you think they are worth now?"

"That is for you to say," said Mr. Heald, smiling; "I am at your mercy."

Jack's face did not respond to the invitation to relax.

"It's not a question of mercy," he replied. "I am asking you what you honestly think the shares are worth. That is the only basis on which a settlement can be made. I should prefer to take them and pay for them if you had them to deliver."

"I must admit that is quite impossible."

"Yes, I know that," said Jack. "They are in my safe."

Mr. Heald was silent. There was no doubt in his mind now that others knew the value of Argonaut as well as he did.

"It certainly is not my place to fix a price," he said at length.

"Why not?" asked Jack quietly. "I have no desire to drive a hard bargain. Until recently you owned a controlling interest in this mine. You

ought to know all about it. I will make you this proposition, Mr. Heald: to settle on any figure you may name as fairly representing the value of the stock to-day."

Mr. Heald thought for a moment.

"There is no use beating about the bush, Mr. Temple" —

"I am not," interrupted Jack.

"I mean there is no use for *me* to do so," continued Mr. Heald imperturbably. "You control the stock, probably for good reasons."

"Yes, I bought it for investment. An estate in which I am interested held a small lot of it, and I sent an expert out to examine the property. I bought it for investment on the strength of his report. You probably know better than I do whether that report is trustworthy and — up to date."

"Will you name your price, then?" said Mr. Heald tersely. "I am not fond of squirming. You shall have your money to-morrow."

"I have no doubt of it whatever, Mr. Heald. I am not anxious about the money. I have the shares, which I consider the important thing. They may be worth fifty, or two hundred and fifty. A mine is an uncertain thing, as you doubtless know. But I think I have gone far enough in proposing to settle on your own figures. If you are not prepared to name them now I can wait. But I scarcely think that would be to your advantage.

Or we can have a referee. Any one you name will suit me."

The wild thought of naming Mabel brought a smile to Mr. Heald's lips in spite of its absurdity. That was the way things were settled on the stage, but not in real life.

"I prefer you should name the referee," he said, rising; "if that is agreeable to you."

"Entirely so," said Jack.

At the door Mr. Heald turned again.

"If it is a proper question I would like to ask about how many shares you hold, Mr. Temple."

"About all, Mr. Heald. I would not have made the proposition I have if there were other interests."

"Would you be disposed to sell your entire interest at any figure — for cash?"

"No. I could better afford to give you a receipt in full for the consideration of one dollar. Would you wish me to do that?"

"No, I pay my debts, Mr. Temple. The office boy may have the dollar."

There was repressed passion in his abrupt "good-afternoon," and he closed the door with a snap as abrupt as his salutation. He did not notice Paul, who was waiting his turn in the outer office, and looking neither to the right nor to the left disappeared in the corridor.

"What's up?" asked Paul, going in.

Jack, whose back was turned, and who was gazing meditatively out of the window, seemed unusually glad to see him.

"Why, Paul!" he exclaimed; "what brings you down?"

"If it is n't a dead secret I should like to have you answer my question first. Your last visitor looked as if he had pretty nearly lost his temper."

"He *is* in bad shape, Paul, — very bad. Do you recollect my telling you I had sent out a man to look over that Argonaut property?"

"Certainly. I can imagine what he found out, too."

"No you can't," said Jack, "not if you try."

"Well, then, I won't try. I don't much care now that Dolly and Margaret are out of it."

"Margaret?" said Jack, looking up; "Margaret who?"

Paul blushed furiously.

"You have my secret if I haven't yours," he said, laughing.

Jack's face grew grave. There are circumstances under which the happiness of others makes us solemn.

"I congratulate you most heartily," he said. "Miss Frazer is a girl in a thousand. But we made a mistake in selling her Argonaut."

The statement was on the face of it so absurd

that Paul's willingness to talk about Margaret was forgotten.

"What do you think the stock is worth, Paul?"

"The tape says, nothing."

"Then you would n't accept a thousand shares for Miss Frazer as a gift. They give presents nowadays on engagements, don't they? You see," Jack went on, enjoying Paul's bewilderment, "this is a case where the tape lies. I have just been trying to settle on a price for that stock with Mr. Heald. We are like the girl who agreed to be married but would n't name the day. We agree that it is worth a good deal of money, but both of us are afraid to say exactly how much. I don't want to be hard on him."

Then he told the whole story.

"What are you going to do?" asked Paul when he had finished.

"Oh, I shall have to let him down easy. He played a sharp game and got caught. I don't like him, — but that's no reason. I have the mine, I don't want the pound of flesh."

"It's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of. It was n't an hour ago I was mentally congratulating Dolly on her escape. Are you going to return her thousand shares too?"

"No," said Jack, turning to his desk. "I have n't the same reason in Mrs. Kensett's case that I have in Miss Frazer's. By the way, I have got to name a referee. Will you act?"

"Not for worlds," objected Paul energetically.

"There's got to be somebody," said Jack, who was looking out of the window again. "It isn't customary for a referee to receive instructions from the interested parties. But if I satisfy the other side, the referee ought to be satisfied too. Think it over. You can wire me to-morrow. When are you going back? Four o'clock! You haven't much time. How is Mabel?"

Paul told *his* story.

Jack listened without moving a muscle. "I am not surprised," was his only comment. "She generally gets where she starts for."

He rang the bell the moment Paul had gone.

"Make out a transfer of a thousand shares of Argonaut to Margaret Frazer and bring it to me at once," he said to the responding clerk.

He signed the transfer blank on the back of the certificate, slipping it into an envelope with some other papers.

"You know Mr. Graham who was just here?" he asked. "Well, get right on the Elevated and catch him at the Grand Central Station. He takes the four o'clock train for Westford. Be lively, or you will miss him."

When Paul opened the envelope he found with the certificate of stock Jack's card, addressed to Margaret, with "Heartiest congratulations" in pencil in the corner; a receipt in full, addressed to

Mr. Heald, with which was folded a half-sheet containing this brief scrawl: —

DEAR PAUL, — If you consent to act, the inclosed will help you out in naming a price.

J. T.

XXIV

MR. HEALD had chosen the Carleton as a place of residence because he objected to the inhospitable atmosphere of the apartment house whose entrance is distinguished by a self-acting elevator and a pneumatic tube. The Carleton possessed a generous hall with an obliging clerk behind its desk and a boy in buttons at the elevator. There was also a newspaper and flower stand in the corner, a quiet billiard-room and bar adjacent, and, beside the ticker, a mahogany inclosure, in which a young woman with a rose in her hair attended to telephone calls. Of most of these adjuncts Mr. Heald made no use, but he liked to have them around. He liked the greeting which awaited him when he entered the Carleton door. He liked the smile of the telephone girl and the bit of color in her hair. He liked the "Good-day, Mr. Heald" from behind the desk, the folded paper when he came down to breakfast, and the extra energy born of hope in the legs of the bell-boy. All these indicated appreciation of his fees rather than of himself, but they imparted a home atmosphere to the place, and gave him a sense of proprietorship. They were his "comforts of home."

He responded to none of these signs of affection, however, on returning from his interview with Jack. This was no unusual occurrence. He paid for civility in cash, and would certainly have lost consideration had he paid only in kind.

The clerk handed him some letters as he came in, and said that a gentleman had called twice that afternoon, leaving no name, — and received a nod in reply. Going up to his room Mr. Heald threw open the window, and without even taking off his hat sat down before it, his hands in his pockets, his head thrown back, plunged in thought. The roar of the street came in from the window with the winter fog. It was a dark, dismal afternoon, and the lights of the city were beginning to tinge the heavy overhanging mist with a dull red glare. The events of the day filed before him as gloomy as the drifting fog. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he would have succeeded. It was sheer hard luck, coupled with his own sentimental folly. Why could n't he keep to business principles? He ought to have sent Mrs. Kensett a check for five hundred dollars and interest, with a fitting acknowledgment of her husband's loan. Instead of which he had chosen to pose in the rôle of benefactor, with the result that just at the turning of the tide Temple sent his damned expert to Arizona. It was always the way, — the incredible, the unexpected, the little stray fox that ate the vines.

Of the future he refused to think. What was the good of figuring up assets? It all depended on Temple. If he set a decently fair price on the stock he was all right. If he was bound to exact the pound of flesh he was ruined. There was nothing to be gained by worrying over that now. He preferred to think of Mabel. He had made a fool of himself there too. The bitter kernel in these reflections was that though he had himself only to blame, the effects were out of all proportion to the causes. His transaction with Mrs. Kensett was founded on a generous impulse, and it was hounding him now like a cur! There were no words to express the folly of his entanglement with Helen, but he had really loved Mabel all the time! Perhaps he had not known it. He knew it now. He might have been a little more civil to her father in parting; he had nearly lost his temper —

Then he was conscious that some one was in the room. In the noise from the street he had not heard the door open, and he turned, expecting to see his man. Instead he saw a slight figure standing in the middle of the floor, a white, haggard face, and a hand with something in it. In the failing light he could not distinguish what the hand held, but he recognized the boyish face of the day before, and knew instantly what was coming.

Simultaneously with the words, "Take that, damn you!" came a flash and a stinging sensation

which was not pain, but which brought an "Ah!" from his lips. Then he sprang forward and wrenched the smoking weapon from his assailant's grasp.

He could have thrown the boy out of the window, but there was no need to do that. The desperate hate which had supplied the courage died with the act.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Heald?"

The voice was the voice of a man bordering on collapse.

"I have n't you to thank if I am not! What the devil" —

"You've ruined me" — the words ended in a hoarse whisper, and the eyes tried in vain to get away from the dripping hand.

Mr. Heald did not do what he thought he would have done under the circumstances.

"Pick up your hat," he said.

The boy obeyed tremblingly.

"How much have you lost?" There was no answer, and the question was repeated angrily. "Do you want me to give you a dose of your own medicine? If you don't, do as I tell you. Open that drawer. Now bring that check-book here." He sat down at the desk by the window and took a pen in his unwounded hand. "Spread it open — that's it. Now, will five thousand dollars make you whole? will *ten*? Why did n't you say so at

once," he said, leaning on the open book and filling out the check. "You can fill in the name yourself. Now mind what I say. You get out of here quietly and cash that check the first thing in the morning, — and mind you don't come sneaking around here to find out if I'm alive. If you do I'll have you arrested for murder — see? Leave your toy here" — his visitor made an effort to speak — "and clear out, *quick*," continued Mr. Heald; "I'm going to ring the bell and tell the doctor what an awkward hand I am with pistols. It's lucky for you the door was shut and the window open. Brace up now," he said, pushing the trembling figure before him with his steady gaze and following him up to the door.

He watched him down the corridor till he disappeared on the stairs, then, closing the door, went into his bedroom and rang the bell.

A few moments later he was explaining to the doctor how the accident happened. Fortunately he had shielded himself with his left hand, and his explanation was fairly plausible.

"I don't quite see, Mr. Heald, how" — the doctor was saying as he fastened the bandage after dressing the wound, when there was a knock at the door and a policeman entered, followed by the clerk.

"He's given himself up, sir. The Inspector'll be here in a minute."

The doctor looked at his patient and smiled.

“The damned idiot!” said Mr. Heald. “I thought he was only crazy, but he’s a fool.”

It was thus that the evening “Extras” contained a full account of the attempted murder of the well-known Wall Street operator, Mr. Reginald Heald, said to be a heavy loser by the recent fall in Argonaut shares, with lurid details of an imaginary character and as much of the hitherto unpublished family history of the interested parties as could readily be supplied at such short notice.

XXV

MRS. FRAZER was greatly relieved to see Mabel come down to breakfast, the morning after their midnight conversation, with all the evidences of a refreshing sleep and a tranquil mind. She had enjoyed neither herself, and had surprised Dolly by marching into the breakfast-room with the assurance of an habitual early riser. Dolly's second surprise came in the form of a kiss from Mabel, who was as usual the last to appear, and who, after stopping at Margaret's chair to say good-morning, stooped to touch her lips to Dolly's hair on her way to the vacant place beside Mrs. Frazer, — a place which the latter had managed to reserve for her. She had a way of coming into a room as the sun comes into the world, with a word and smile of general greeting, which each could accept as a personal communication. She seemed aware of the relief and approval depicted on Mrs. Frazer's face, and still further increased that lady's satisfaction by announcing that she was desperately hungry, adding in a low tone that she had been very silly the night before. Then she proposed to Margaret that they should ride over to the farm to see how the patient was getting on.

She came down in her riding-habit after breakfast was over, and went out to the stables with Margaret in seemingly high spirits. She won the respect of the groom by disdaining the chair which he brought and springing lightly from his hand to her seat. Margaret agreed with her that they needed no one to accompany them.

It was a beautiful day ; the snow was melting in the warm sun, and there were people on the piazza as they rode down the avenue. Mabel waved her whip to them as she disappeared under the trees.

“Do you like people ?” she asked Margaret.

“Why yes, some people,” said Margaret ; “don’t you ?”

“I mean *most* people, the people like the blocks of houses in New York, with eyes and noses like the doors and windows, — the people that only have numbers to distinguish them.”

Margaret laughed. “Perhaps it is well we do not all like the same ones,” she said.

“Shall we have a gallop? Come!” cried Mabel.

But the snow was softening, and they reined in their horses before reaching the wood.

“I love to ride,” said Mabel, patting her horse’s neck ; “I feel so free. People tie you hand and foot. I should like to ride on and on and on, — and never come back. We have lived so long in cages, though, I suppose we should tire even of freedom. Do we turn in here ?”

They rode on side by side down the lane so dear to Margaret, where she had lost her lonely liberty for a sweeter bondage. The doctor's sleigh was at the door, and the blanketed mare whinnied at their approach. Mr. Pearson came out at once, and called to Jim to take the horses. But Mabel refused to dismount.

"How is he?" she asked.

"Waal," said Mr. Pearson, "he's doin' well enough. I reckon he won't chop no more trees. Trampin' round the country won't be no easy job neither."

The doctor appeared in his shaggy fur coat, and confirmed Mr. Pearson's statements.

"I was thinking we might get up a subscription for a wooden leg," he said to Margaret.

Margaret promised to speak to Mrs. Kensett about it, and asked if there was anything needed.

While she was speaking Mrs. Pearson came to the door, bareheaded, in a checked apron, and after exchanging a word with Margaret stared at Mabel as if she had a load upon her mind which must be relieved.

"Be you the young lady what helped the doctor? My! You don't look like you'd hurt a fly. Won't you come in? He'd be dreadful glad to see you."

"You go," said Mabel to Margaret.

Margaret did not wish to, but yielded, thinking it would give pleasure.

"What would a leg cost?" asked Mabel of the doctor, who was turning his sleigh with Mr. Pearson's help. He told her what he thought the expense would be.

"Order him one," she said, as if she were ordering a box of her favorite chocolates at Maillard's. "I will see it is paid for."

When Margaret rejoined her she proposed they should return through the village.

"It's nice not to have some one tagging at your heels," she said, as they cantered up the lane to the main road.

"I thought you would be just the person to insist upon a groom."

"Did you? One has to in town. Do you know all these people? Every one we meet bows to you."

"Not all. But they all know me."

"I might live here a hundred years and not know one of them."

"You know the Pearsons and one tramp already."

"So I do," laughed Mabel. "I wonder if they really enjoy life, puttering about on their farms."

"It's much less tiresome than some of the puttering about we have to do in society."

"Oh, of course. But the life is so narrow, their interests so small. Still, I presume their babies and new dresses are of as much importance to

them as ours are to us. Helen, you know, is my baby," she added.

"I like Miss Gaunt very much," said Margaret warmly.

"So do I. We all have a tender feeling for people that cannot walk alone."

"She seems to be making her own way in life."

"I wonder if she could," said Mabel meditatively, "if all the props were knocked away."

Margaret thought the remark a strange one, and, not understanding it, made no reply. She could not make out whether she liked Mabel or not. She could not refuse her a kind of admiration, but when ready to give more Mabel's indifference chilled her. The moment she won a little affection she seemed to throw it deliberately away.

They rode home almost in silence. Mabel's spirits had flagged perceptibly. At the gate they met Dorothy on her pony, and a groom, who told them that every one had gone up to the sugar camp for luncheon, and that Mrs. Kensett had said that they were to join her there. She had left word to this effect in case they failed to meet on the way. Mabel made the excuse of letters to write and declined to go. Margaret knew the rule of the house, that one was to do as one pleased, and after a little polite insistence rode off with Dorothy. Ever since her mother's remark that she saw nothing of what was going on about her she

had endeavored to cultivate her powers of observation, with the result that she did not know whether it was observation or imagination that was at work. She concluded in this case that it was imagination. She had her own secret happiness and was not disposed to see trouble, and Dorothy's gleeful mood matched her own better than Mabel's did.

The latter had luncheon alone with Mrs. Frazer, whom she won anew by evincing great interest in solitaire and by extreme amiability toward Professor Fisher, who made a long call, with his sister, in the afternoon.

Helen had resolved to have her explanation with Mabel that morning. She went directly to Mabel's room after dressing, relying upon Mabel's late hours; but the windows were wide open, and Marie, who was struggling with the chaos of her mistress's toilet, said she had gone down. She was not at the breakfast-table, but came in later from the piazza where Helen had certainly never dreamed of looking for her at that hour. After breakfast she had ridden off with Margaret to the farm, and did not put in an appearance at the sugar camp at all. There were the quiet hours after tea when every one was resting before dressing for dinner, and upon these Helen counted. When tea was brought to her room she said she would take hers with Miss Temple, and followed the servant with the tray to Mabel's door.

Mabel was holding a reception. There were three or four girls with her, including Constance, and the furniture was strewn with costumes for the evening's charades. Constance was pinning the drapery of the Foolish Virgin when Helen came in.

"You are a perfect genius, Constance," Mabel was saying. "You ought to be a dressmaker."

"I will if you will be my model," said Constance, who was kneeling beside her before the pier-glass; "everything fits on you."

"What do you think, Helen?" asked Mabel, looking at herself in the mirror; "will that do? I *must* convert the Bishop." She wore a gold band about her forehead, clasped under her hair, and had pressed a plain, old-fashioned bracelet of Mrs. Frazer's into service as an armlet. "Just enough jewelry to show my folly," she said. Constance, still kneeling, surveyed her work critically.

"You will make the wisest Wise Virgin imaginable," said Mabel, looking down upon her. "You are a perfect image of prudence and demureness. You must not look too sweet to-night or I shall kiss you. I should lose my case with the Bishop."

Constance laughed, and the time slipped by in discussion and chatter which grated on Helen's nerves. When the clock struck seven there was a hurried gathering up of costumes and accessories, a quarter of an hour of last words and suggestions, and then Mabel rang the bell for Marie.

"I want to speak to you," began Helen, who had lingered behind.

"Well — speak," said Mabel, ringing the bell again impatiently.

"Will you let Marie wait a few minutes, Mabel? There is time enough."

Mabel turned.

"Do you mean you have something — particular — to say?"

"Yes."

"Can't you wait till to-morrow? You know I am the Foolish Virgin to-night. You could n't get a drop of wisdom out of me."

Helen summoned up all her resolution.

"I am not going to be treated in this way. I don't know what I have done, but if I cannot have either your love or your courtesy you cannot have my society."

She had gone too far. She had intended to soothe, not aggravate. Indignation at what she considered Mabel's flippancy had carried her away.

Mabel looked at her in astonishment. "It has got to come," she thought. But she was not ready. Would she ever be ready?

"Cannot you wait till to-morrow?" — herself waiting for the sound of Marie's footsteps. "We will have our breakfast here together. It will be quiet, and there will be plenty of time, — there's hardly enough to dress now. I have something to say to you too."

She saw instantly the effect produced by this last declaration, and in this she was not mistaken. Helen had expected one of Mabel's sudden alternations of mood, — an explanation, she hardly knew in what form, — ending in reconciliation. She had resolved it should not be too easy, and had had a vision of a penitent Mabel, confessing that she was too old and too reasonable to act like a petulant child. The Mabel she saw was calmer and more in earnest than she was herself, and her quiet announcement that she also had something to say frightened her. Her father used to send for her as a little girl with the same message of mysterious import, and she felt now as she did then when she went trembling to his door wondering what that awful "something" could be.

"How many times must I ring, Marie, before you deign to answer the bell?"

Marie had run all the way upstairs, but knew the laws of mechanics too well to attempt the repression of escaping steam. Experience had taught her that a fit of generosity generally followed an explosion of this sort, and that meekness was better than explanations. She had also observed the signs of an unusual storm, and had the wit to see that her insignificant self was not the cause of it. She therefore closed the door softly after Helen and went about her duties in silence.

The evening's entertainment was a great success. There was an amusing French monologue by the

attaché, with charades and tableaux, the audience being increased by a large delegation from Lemington. Paul came up from New York by the last train, and entered just as Margaret sat down before the piano at Mabel's request for an impromptu closing dance, — the Virginia reel. Mabel caught the secret glance of intelligence which passed between Paul and Margaret and interpreted it correctly. She was in her best mood, sensitive as the most delicate instrument in a physical laboratory to everything about her; but the Bishop touched the wrong chord when, bidding her good-night, he said, with a playful smile and admonishing shake of the head, "You made sin very attractive."

She blazed up at once.

"There is n't enough blood in my veins for two," she replied, "but I would give the last drop — for one I loved." The sentence began in deadly earnest, and ended in such an uncertain mixture of seriousness and mockery that the Bishop could not choose between them.

After a function of any description Mrs. Frazer liked to talk things over, and with Paul and Margaret was waiting for Dolly to finish her last words with her scattering guests, when Mabel joined them as though she were one of the family and privileged to remain.

"Did you see Mr. Heald to-day?" asked Dolly, coming up. "He said he would write."

Helen was saying good-night, but the question made her linger, ostensibly for Mabel, as was natural.

"Yes," said Paul. "I met him by chance down town."

"When is he coming back?"

"I don't think he will come back at all."

Helen listened intently.

"I am glad of it!" exclaimed Mrs. Frazer. "I cannot tolerate him."

"Why, Laurinda!" said Dolly reproachfully; "you should not speak so of my guests."

"You need not defend him," interposed Mabel. "I am responsible for him. I asked you to invite him."

"He needs no defense here," said Dolly with dignity. "Mrs. Frazer does not mean what she says."

"I should be willing to put my opinion to vote," persisted Mrs. Frazer.

Paul set his foot on the threatening blaze by saying that the weather in New York was detestable, and that he was glad to get back from fog to sunshine. Then Helen withdrew and was presently followed by Mabel, and Paul had at last the opportunity to tell his news.

"No one knows," he said in finishing, "what Jack has made out of this, — millions, perhaps. As for Heald, Mrs. Frazer, I rather agreed with you this morning. But he's not such a bad fellow,

after all. He's in luck to have Jack Temple instead of you to deal with at any rate."

He did not feel at liberty to relate his conversation with Mr. Heald, but to Margaret, after the others were gone, he told the whole story.

Helen went to her room with bitterness in her heart. *He was not coming back at all.* And he had not said or written a single word.

In the happiness of his first approaches she had felt that new joy of being sought for, which came into her lonely life, telling her that it had been lonelier than she knew, lifting her out of nothingness into the consciousness that she was worth seeking. Happiness had almost passed her by. It were a thousand times better it had never found her if it were to forsake her now. She tried hard not to doubt it, to silence her misgivings, but she kept stealing back to it in thought, as a mother steals to the cradle of her sick child to search its face for reassuring signs, and when she went to bed she held it in the shelter of her arms.

Was it doomed to die? What, after all, had he said or done? He did not love Mabel, — that he had said. And Mabel had said she would be delighted if he asked her — Helen — to marry him. At the time this had given her unfeigned happiness. It gave her none now. He had not asked her. The thought that Mabel should ever know that choked her. Why had she allowed Mabel to

get even a glimpse of her heart so soon? And why had she trifled with fortune when it looked her way? Because she was not sure of herself, because it was so sudden, because the infinite greatness of Love when she looked into its face frightened her, and, worst of all, because she was not sure of him. No one seemed to like him thoroughly. Would that make any difference if she really loved him? She remembered one of her school friends who had been years making up her mind, who declared she never had made it up herself, that it had been made up for her when her lover caught her in his arms. All became clear then, and the marriage had been a very happy one. Was that the story of all women? It was not the picture she had drawn. It was the right and glory of a woman to love as wholly, as consciously, as the man who wooed her. Why then had she run away that day in the picture-gallery? She had told him she hated him. She tried to feel that had been a grievous fault. Why had she said so? It was not true. Why had she put him off afterwards? Every barrier between them she had set up herself. Yet in the depth of her heart she knew all this was miserable subterfuge. If he really loved her he would have broken every barrier down. She had wanted nothing less than to feel the arms about her, even when she turned her back and walked away. And they had not come.

A hundred times before she fell asleep she was on the point of lighting her candle and writing him a letter. She wrote it and re-wrote it in thought, always the same, a single word : Come. But he had left her without a word, without a sign a waiting woman might read ; and she went over and over all that had passed between them since their meeting in the Academy, the foolish raillery which had been so sweet in the anticipation of what was to come seemed foolish indeed, and her poor little romance grew more and more threadbare and insincere.

The truth was, and she knew it, she was afraid — afraid of him. She was willing to be a little afraid of the man she loved, but her fear was the fear of mistrust, — a fatal fear for love. Perhaps it was not love of him, but of independence ; the longing to escape from the single-handed struggle with the world and the dread of falling back from ease and luxury into the little miseries of life. How willingly she would have undergone the supreme test, the embrace of the loving arms that should wake her out of this nightmare of doubt with their final Yes or No.

Then, not knowing whether she had been dreaming or asleep, she heard a voice calling : —

“Helen, Helen, are you awake?”

XXVI

THERE was a portion of the daily mail of Cedar Hill which did not commonly penetrate beyond the precincts of the servants' dining-room, for which Dolly had generously provided a sum devoted to the gratification of its literary tastes. It consisted chiefly of publications given up to the record of social events, descriptions of the mode of life and manner of dressing of sovereigns and other distinguished personages, rules for correct behavior in polite society, reproductions of the physical attractions of the stage, and advice suited to a variety of delicate or difficult situations in life.

On this particular morning, however, interest in these things was overshadowed by the lurid account in an evening paper of the tragedy at the Carleton. It was not an altogether correct version. Had it been so it would have failed of its mission, which was, incidentally, to produce the greatest possible effect upon the appetite for news, and thus, ultimately, upon the office receipts. The butler read it aloud in solemn tones to an awestruck audience before the house was astir, and Marie had placed it on the tray with other less interesting mail

matter to await the signal for which, for once in her life, she impatiently listened. To her relief it came earlier than usual.

“Something dreadful ’s happened, Miss Mabel,” she said, while yet feeling her way to the table in the darkened room. “They ’ve shot Mr. Heald.”

Mabel sat up in bed, scarcely comprehending what she heard.

When she fell asleep she was as far as ever from being ready. She had slept soundly, without a dream, as men will on the eve of execution, and had waked suddenly, every sense wide open, as far from being ready as when she dropped into her leaden sleep. She had had moments of self-delusion, as men will have who are doomed to die, when she could almost persuade herself that it was all a nightmare, that Helen had really nothing important to say, and that when she rang her bell Marie would come and open the shutters to the light and happiness of her old, every-day life. Then she fell back into the darkness of reality, groping feverishly for the door which she could not find, lying very still the while, as a man bound fast hand and foot must lie, though he wrestles in mind with the suffocation and oppression of his helplessness. Then, as men will do who must move forward into the unknown whether they wish to or not, she rang the bell in sheer exhaustion — to end it all.

“They ’ve shot Mr. Heald!” It was not the

door she had been groping for. It was the unexpected, undreamed-of door. Marie's announcement was a lightning flash, but its import came slowly, gathering force little by little, as the following thunder does.

"Open the blinds, Marie," — she said it from force of habit, — "and put the tray here, on the bed. Now you may go." She saw the paper, but she would not touch it till she was alone. "Is Helen awake?"

Marie said no one was up yet. It was only seven o'clock. Should she get the bath ready?

"No."

It was the no of dismissal, and Marie reluctantly withdrew.

"Awful tragedy at the Carleton. Mr. Reginald Heald, the well-known Wall Street operator, assaulted by a victim of the Argonaut deal. Condition serious, but not desperate. The would-be assassin surrenders himself. Revenge said to be the motive. Suspicious check found on his person. The mystery being probed by our special reporter," — and so it went on in leaded type for several columns.

The details were nothing to Mabel. There was only one fact for her, — this was the man she loved. And all the rights and privileges of love became instantly hers. There was no other love besides hers in the world. She got up, holding the

paper tightly in her hand, slipped into her dressing-gown, and went to Helen's door.

"Helen, Helen, are you awake?"

Without waiting for an answer she drew back the curtain from the window and let in the gray morning light.

"Is that you, Mabel? What is the matter?"

For answer Mabel put the paper into Helen's hand and sat down on the edge of the bed, possessed by one thought only, — this was the woman in the way. She had stood so long between the two impossibilities of self-effacement and self-assertion that any door, though it opened upon another agony, was a relief.

She watched Helen's face breathlessly. There was a scared look in her eyes. Was it possible they saw no opportunity? Were they blind, or dead? And instantly, out of the night in her heart, something, which was not yet hope, shone like a light glimmering far away in the darkness. It was all she could do to keep it out of sight, out of her own eyes, hidden, where it burned in the depth of her heart.

"Helen, Helen," she said, "do you love him enough to go to him?"

All her soul was in the question and all her fate in its answer.

"Helen, dear," she repeated, bending over the head buried in the pillow, and laying her hand on

the shoulders shaken with sobs, "that is your place."

"My place," cried Helen, — her face was hidden from sight, — "oh no — no — it was never mine."

"Do you mean" — The words died on her lips.

"He never loved me — it was all a lie, a cruel lie" — the words came fast with her tears — "a cruel, cruel lie."

There was silence.

"And *you*?" It was almost a whisper.

Helen raised herself with a sudden energy. The question almost stopped the tears.

"I should hate him if he were not dying."

"He is not dying," said Mabel gently. Not all the newspapers in the world could make her believe that. She was growing calmer. The light in her heart burned stronger and steadier. But she made one more effort to put it out.

"Helen dear, Helen, you may be wrong. It would be terrible now — when he is in trouble. Is there no pity, no forgiveness, in your heart?" She took the swaying figure to her breast and hid the light in her own eyes in Helen's hair.

"It might have been once — it is too late — it is dead — he has killed it — killed it! Oh, why was it ever born!" She held her stricken Love in her arms as a mother holds her dead child.

"But, Helen, nothing is too late for love"—she was speaking wildly, but she went steadily on. "It costs nothing to forgive the man you love—it's joy"—

Helen freed herself from the encircling arms and looked into Mabel's eyes. Her own were dry now.

"Do you mean you would throw yourself into the arms of a man who had mocked you—insulted you?"

"Yes."

"Who had—I don't know what he has done—but who has done enough to drive his victim to murder?"

"Yes."

"Mabel, you love him."

"I refused him—once."

"And now?"

"If you do not go to him, I shall."

"Does he love you?"

"Yes."

"He has told you so—again?"

"Yes."

"Here, since we came?" The last poor remnant of her romance was shriveling up like a bit of paper in the flames.

"Yes, I refused him again."

"For my sake?"

"No, for my own."

"Then he has always loved you," she said slowly.

"I do not ask," said Mabel in a low voice. She was thinking of what might have happened if she had never invited him to Cedar Hill, or warned him in the train not to play with Helen.

"And you think I could love a man who played fast and loose with two women, who" —

"Take care, Helen!" But she repressed the rush of feeling and humbled herself again. "Remember, I have been loyal to him and to you."

"Go — go" — It was the cry of the heart that wants to be alone.

Mabel rose from the bedside and went slowly to the door. Her fingers were on the handle before she turned.

"If I go out of your room now — so," — her voice began to quiver, then steadied again, — "I go out of your life. Is that what you wish?"

Helen sprang from the bed and caught her in her arms.

"No, oh no! but go — go." And then the door was shut and Mabel was alone.

She knew it was better so, that she had no words of healing to give. Her mind was fixed already on other things. She went down the long hall resolutely till she came to Mrs. Frazer's door, knocked, and without waiting for an answer went in.

Mrs. Frazer was still in bed ; her breakfast, untouched, was on the table beside her. The open paper which fell from her hand as Mabel entered explained why. One glance at her visitor's white face was sufficient to tell her that the shot fired in New York had struck two.

"Will you do something for me?" said Mabel.

"What is it, dear?" said Mrs. Frazer, forgetting even that her wig was on the dressing-table.

"I want you to go to New York with me."

"To New York!" gasped Mrs. Frazer.

"There is a train at nine o'clock."

"But, my dear child" —

"If you will not come with me I shall go alone."

Mrs. Frazer glanced at the clock ticking on the table. Questions were needless and expostulations vain — that was clear.

"I do not want to see any one. You can tell Mrs. Kensett," said Mabel.

"You realize that every one will know?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Frazer took one of the cold white hands and pressed it gently.

"Ring my bell," she said quietly. "I will meet you on the piazza in half an hour."

"I shall be at the gate," said Mabel simply. Her gratitude was in her eyes.

Three quarters of an hour later they were

driving through the morning mist to the Westford station.

There was one item in Mabel's account with Mrs. Frazer for services rendered which was never set down, and whose magnitude she never appreciated: the work accomplished in the half hour before they started for New York. "I did not dress," Mrs. Frazer used to say in relating the events of the day, "I was harnessed. I hope the Lord will forgive me for the things left undone. It worries me now to think of them. But dear me! nothing is important in itself, not even the getting on of one's wig straight."

She had sent for Dolly at once, and in such gaps as her toilet allowed had explained the situation, and made some suggestions. They were suggestions in form, but in fact were decrees of law. Dolly was overpowered by the rush of events and the number of her instructions. She was to order the sleigh at once. She was to get from Paul the receipt Jack had signed for Mr. Heald, — it might prove useful. She was to say anything she pleased in explanation of Mabel's departure, — it did not matter much what she said, — and she was to accept the slightest intimation on the part of her guests that the house party should come to an end, — she was to intimate it herself if necessary. She was to see that Marie packed Mabel's trunks and went to New York that afternoon, — for Mabel, of

course, could not return. Above all, she was to keep out of the way. In addition to all this she was constantly called upon to assist Mrs. Frazer's maid, a silent, middle-aged woman, incapable of doing in the half of one hour what had always required two. The purse was in the back corner of the upper drawer ; the flask of whiskey was vaguely indicated as " somewhere in the closet ; " there were her smelling salts, and handkerchief, and spectacles, — the lorgnette could not be found, being on the bed under the newspaper, — and at last Mrs. Frazer, wrapped in her cloak, marched down the stairs. As she got into the sleigh waiting for her she laid her hand impressively on Dolly's arm, and said : —

" To think that of all this we saw nothing ! "

There was a slim figure in a dark gray dress at the gate. Not a word was said as they drove down the Westford road, except once when Mabel asked if there was plenty of time. The night express was an hour late. It was the long weary hour with which Fate sometimes mocks us, when the wheels of Time stand still at the wrong moment. Mrs. Frazer said it was the longest hour of her life. She looked up the track to where it curved out of sight, as if looking would bring the belated train ; and then they walked up and down, up and down the platform, white with the night's frost, till the cold drove them into the dismal room again and

its close hot air drove them back into the cold. At last the welcome roar came down the valley, the mighty engine panted in, and the engineer in his cab, seeing a white face staring into his as he went by, thought of wife and children at home, and said to himself that if the signals showed a clear track he could make up half his lost time.

At the Grand Central Station Mabel led the way. Almost anything became her, but Mrs. Frazer thought she had never seen her so beautiful in spite of the paleness and dark-circled eyes — or so faultlessly dressed. And being a woman, she sighed and wished she was young.

The boy with the morning papers had passed through the car before they reached New York. Either Mabel had not seen him, or did not dare to. She sat still, her gaze fixed on the flying landscape, one hand fast in Mrs. Frazer's under her cloak, repeating to herself, "If the need came to me, would any barrier keep you away?"

"The Carleton," she said, as they got into the coupé.

Mrs. Frazer stood in no great awe of the proprieties. She had scoffed at the conventional all her life. Still, as the coupé rolled on, she began to think what was to be done. She concluded to cross no bridges till she came to them, and to do as far as possible what Mabel wished. They stopped at the ladies' entrance, and a hall-boy came to the

carriage door as they drove up, looking, as all the rest of the world did, as if nothing had happened.

“Show us to Mr. Heald’s room,” said Mabel.

The boy’s face betrayed immediate interest and hesitation.

“Do you hear what I say?” said Mrs. Frazer, who had said nothing. “Show us to Mr. Heald’s room.”

“The doctor’s up there,” replied the boy confusedly.

“So much the better,” said Mrs. Frazer tranquilly. She had taken command again.

“This is his parlor,” said the boy after they had left the elevator and traversed the long hall. “Who shall I say” —

Mrs. Frazer waved him aside and opened the door. The emergency doctor, summoned in haste the night before, seeing a woman enter so uncereemoniously, jumped at the probable.

“Mrs. Heald, I presume,” he said, advancing from the inner room.

“I am for the present,” said Laurinda.

“He will be glad to see you—I was not aware” — He was beginning to grasp the strangeness of the reply.

“Then I may go in?”

“Certainly. I am happy to say” —

Mrs. Frazer turned to Mabel. “Go, dear,” she said softly.

Mabel’s resolution had vanished. He was alive.

She had heard the reassuring words. Her heart was beating so cruelly that she could not move.

“Go, dear, go.”

Then she went in, and Mrs. Frazer closed the door behind her and shut out the world.

“It was an ugly wound,” explained the doctor, “but nothing dangerous. A man does the right thing instinctively. He put out his hand. That probably saved his life, Mrs. Heald.”

“I am not Mrs. Heald,” said Laurinda sharply, “I am Mrs. Frazer.” The doctor smiled discreetly. The smile irritated Mrs. Frazer, and she went on tartly. “The young lady” — she motioned to the closed door — “is Miss Temple.”

“Yes, yes, I know her father.”

“Very likely, Mr.” —

“Drummond,” said the doctor.

— “Mr. Drummond, and you will know nothing of what I tell you till I authorize you. Have you a nurse here?”

“She is at breakfast, Mrs. Frazer.”

“Very good, I will remain till she returns. Meanwhile will you have the kindness to send this card to Mr. John Temple of Gramercy Park. The coupé at the door is mine.” She took a card from her chatelaine bag, wrote a few words in pencil, and inclosed it in an envelope from the desk by the window. “You have no directions to leave before you go?” she asked.

"None. You may count upon my discretion."

"There is no discretion needed," said Mrs. Frazer, unbending. "It is quite sufficient that I am dealing with a gentleman."

The doctor bowed and withdrew. Mrs. Frazer followed him to the door and rang the bell.

"Bring me some breakfast," she said to the waiter; "a bit of broiled steak and some coffee, and a baked apple, with cream. Is there a telephone in the house? Well — send for Mr. Temple's carriage — of Gramercy Park."

She was taking off her cloak and arranging her wig before the mirror above the fireplace when the door opened and shut, a pair of arms were flung about her neck, and a face sobbing with joy was on her breast.

"He wants to speak to you," said Mabel. "I must see papa at once."

"Now listen to me, child. Have you eaten anything this morning?"

"No."

"I thought not. You cannot subsist on air or happiness."

"But I must see papa at once. It is absolutely necessary."

"You will eat first. I have ordered something for you, and I have telephoned for your carriage. Here is the breakfast now. The carriage will be

here before you have finished. It's not proper for you to be driving about alone in a cab."

"I cannot eat here," said Mabel. "What do you think papa will say?" She was excited, eager to go. "You think of everything. Oh, how good you have been to me!"

"I have n't the least idea what he will say," Mrs. Frazer said, moving toward the door. "I have known people to be very nasty under such circumstances. I left word with Marie to come down this afternoon. I shall get you home and return by the three o'clock train. Sit down now and eat your breakfast like a sensible girl." Then she went in.

Mr. Heald was sitting in a chair by the window, his bandaged arm in a sling.

"I want to thank you for your kindness to Mabel, Mrs. Frazer," he said, making an effort to rise.

She waved him back and sat down. "One does what one can with a runaway horse, Mr. Heald."

"She is a noble girl, — it is more than I deserve."

"I have heard that remark from men before," said Mrs. Frazer freezingly. "You seem to have succeeded in making her over; perhaps she may do the same for you. I shall take her to her father, and then wash my hands of the whole business."

Mr. Heald smiled. "You have been very good," he said, "but I have one more thing to ask of you. I have some business to settle with Mr. Temple of which I have said nothing to Mabel. If he would be so good as to come here before he sees his daughter, — do you think you could arrange that? I *must* see him before she does. It is a question of honor."

"I know all about it," said Laurinda, enjoying the stupefaction which spread over his face. "Mr. Graham has been made referee. He told me so last night."

"You seem to know everything, Mrs. Frazer."

"On the contrary," she replied grimly, "so much has gone on under my eyes which I never suspected that I believe I am in my dotage."

"But I must see Mr. Temple," he repeated earnestly. "You would be the first to say so if you knew all."

"Why? Mr. Graham has his instructions from Mr. Temple. Would you like to look at them?" She took a paper from her bag and handed it to him.

He read it slowly, twice.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "I can't accept that, — it is impossible."

"You won't get any better terms out of John Temple," said Mrs. Frazer. "Moreover, you are not in a position to exact them."

He passed his unwounded hand over his forehead in a dazed sort of way.

“Will you call Miss Temple, please?”

Mrs. Frazer went to the door.

“Mercy,” she cried, “the child’s gone!”

XXVII

JACK was sitting at the head of the long table in the directors' room on the first floor when Mrs. Frazer's message was brought in from the office. The word *urgent* was a familiar superscription, generally indicating something of more importance to the writer than to the reader, and he twirled the envelope between his thumb and forefinger till the speaker, who was stating his views on the reorganization scheme before the Board, had finished ; then, while talking with his nearest neighbor, he took up his heavy scissors and cut the edge. Mrs. Frazer's card fell out.

"Mabel is here. I have done what I could. You had best come and attend to the rest yourself."

It was not a very explicit message. It was not intended to be. It was hopeless to attempt an explanation on a visiting card, it was considerate not to excite undue alarm, yet it was imperative to excite enough to tear Mr. Temple away from less important business.

Jack's mind reviewed all the possibilities, and settled upon illness as the most probable. Mabel was a nervous, high-strung girl, always well to be

sure, but certainly not used to surgical operations. Something serious it must be to make her abandon a house party at Cedar Hill. Yet the tenor of the message as he re-read it did not exactly fit the illness theory, and there was no address. "Here" must mean home, he thought.

He asked permission to state his views on the question before the Board, expressed his approval of the plan submitted by the Committee, suggested an adjournment in case of any divergence of opinion, requested the vice-president to take the chair, and excused himself on the ground of an unexpected and pressing private call. He went upstairs with Mrs. Frazer's card in his hand, pre-occupied and uneasy, less and less satisfied with his first conjecture. Mabel had never justified the anxiety with which he had watched her development. As he had said to the Bishop in all sincerity, she had been a good girl. She had often threatened to be what she never was and to do what she never did, and he remembered with satisfaction that she had always stopped short of precipices with a surprising display of prudence and sense of responsibility. Still, he would have felt less concern if he were dealing with a boy. He knew what boys might do, — but a woman!

He left word for Mr. Brown that he could not see him that afternoon about the superintendency of the Argonaut mine, and would arrange for an

interview later. Then he glanced over a litter of papers and documents on his desk, closed the rolling top, and was putting on his coat when the door opened and shut quickly and a pair of arms were flung about his neck. It was a moment before he could disengage himself, a moment in which he realized that it was not illness, but the other thing — whatever that might be. No, she was not ill, she was ominously well.

“Mabel!” he said, half-suffocated, “what is it? What brings you back?”

She was sitting now, not in the visitor’s chair, but in his own, radiant with everything foreign to “down town.” He loved her, he was proud of her, — he could not help it.

“Take off your coat, papa. I have lots to tell you.”

Jack hung up his coat and sat down in the visitor’s chair.

“First — do you love me?” She was on his knees now, looking into his eyes.

He admitted that he did. “But what does this mean, Mabel?” he said, halfway between sternness and relentment.

“It means this, papa: I am going to be married.” And then came the real surprise. Mabel, who was never silly or hysterical, burst into tears. “I want you to be pleased, papa,” — and that was all she could say.

Jack's face had relaxed. So she wanted to be married! Was that all? He did not believe in interfering with affairs of the heart. He knew that when men try to dam the waters of love they are generally swept away. He kissed the tear-stained face and irretrievably committed himself to this view by saying he was pleased. At the same time with the relief came a disturbing sense of helplessness. His child was never so near or so dear to him, yet he was abdicating. Who was taking his place? He realized the enormous difference between theory and practice when Mabel first pronounced Mr. Heald's name. It was impossible to conceal the fact that this was not the man he would have chosen. Mabel could read that in his silence and in the shadow of disappointment on his face. But nothing daunts love at the flood.

"Papa dear, it had to be — I could not help it" — and then, between tears and kisses, she told him all she chose to tell. He listened patiently, sympathetically, more helpless than ever before the confidence and serenity of love. She could not help it — nor he! It was all settled, fixed, consummated. She made that clear, not arrogantly, but with sweet conviction. It had to be! He was thinking meanwhile that after all the Argonaut mine was not likely to change hands.

"But, Mabel," he said, at the first pause, "why should you come to New York in this way? Could you not wait — did not Mrs. Frazer" —

“Papa dear, you must n’t try to understand everything.” She was quite calm now. “Can you explain every single thing you do?” Jack’s thoughts went back into the past. No, he certainly could not do that. “Mrs. Frazer has been very good to me. I think I love her next to you.” She looked up suddenly into his face. “I want you to do something for me — promise me you will — without asking what it is — will you, will you?”

“I suppose I must promise you anything to-day, Mabel.”

“Would you go and thank her for me? She is to take the three o’clock train for Westford. She ought not to go alone, do you think so? Is there anything to prevent you from going with her? You might bring back Marie, you know, — and explain to Mrs. Kensett,” — she paused, then added, “I would rather be alone to-day.”

Jack took out his watch. “There is n’t much time,” he said.

“There is time enough, papa. You can telephone to the house and have your things sent to the train. You can’t get back to-night, you know.”

“You think it would gratify Mrs. Frazer?”

“It would gratify *me*, papa, to have your open approval — at once — with every one.”

That seemed reasonable. His finger was on the bell and he was about to ring, when Mabel spoke.

"Wait a moment, papa ; I have another reason. I have quarreled with Helen."

"Quarreled with Helen !" It was a day of surprises. He turned, waiting for her to explain. She had gone to the window, the window out of which he had so often looked away from care into another world, and was silently putting on her gloves. "I hope you are not to blame, Mabel."

"I am not solely to blame."

"Do you wish me to take her any message ?"

"No."

He was completely at a loss to understand. "If you are to blame at all, Mabel, would n't that be better — before she comes back ?"

"She will never come back."

"What !" said Jack sharply. "Never come back ?"

She turned now, and he saw there were tears in her eyes again.

"I cannot explain, papa. You must not ask. If there is any explanation to be made she will make it. But she never will." The logic was hard to follow. "I thought you ought to know before you saw her. She will probably wish to go home." He went over and laid his hand on her shoulder. "Don't ask me any questions, please, papa," she said, forestalling the one on his lips. "She will not come back. I would not if I were in her place."

"You cannot tell me what this means?"

"No. She would not wish me to." How mercifully dull men were!

He could make nothing out of it. He took a turn across the room and came back again.

"You must be acting hastily, Mabel. Helen has been a faithful companion and friend to you."

"Yes, but it is finished. She will tell you in her own way. I should have left her to speak, to make her own explanation, as is her right, but I was afraid you would offer her money."

He was more bewildered than ever. "Money? I should certainly never allow her to leave us without *some* acknowledgment of my appreciation of her services. You would wish that too, Mabel."

"Yes, I could wish it — but you must not dare — all the money in the world" — she stopped short. "Papa, you must go, or you will be too late for the train. Some day," she said, as she kissed him good-by at the door, "I will tell you — not now. It is her secret, not mine."

Jack pondered without result over the matter all the way up town. His man with his bag caught him as the train was moving out. He walked through the cars in search of Mrs. Frazer, and found her sitting wrapped in her cloak, with her back to every one in the car.

"Well" — he said, dropping into the chair beside her. She did not seem surprised to see him,

and made no reply at once. She was in the stage of reaction, not altogether sure whether she approved of herself and the world in general or not.

"John," she said at length piteously, "I knew no more of what was going on than a blind puppy." Then she proceeded to tell him her story, in which were certain particulars Mabel had omitted from hers.

"You did quite right," he said soothingly. "There was nothing else to be done."

"Nothing," said Mrs. Frazer emphatically. "We did not know but the man was dead. She would certainly have gone without me."

"I think she would," assented Jack. "I am very grateful to you, and you may be sure Mabel is," he added warmly. "It was she who insisted upon my going back with you." Mrs. Frazer's mouth opened with attentive surprise. "You may feel assured of that," Jack continued; "her heart is sound."

There was a long silence during which something seemed to be slowly taking shape in Mrs. Frazer's mind.

"I think it will be best to send a telegram to Dolly, to let her know we are coming," she said at length.

Jack called the porter.

"Bring me a telegraph blank," interposed Mrs. Frazer. She took a pencil from her bag and wrote the message herself.

"John and I arrive by three o'clock train."

Her pencil hesitated at this point and she looked out of the window before resuming.

"Don't be a goose. We have made no mistakes. LAURINDA."

Then she folded the blank and gave it to the porter.

Dolly received it about five o'clock, as the depleted household was gathering around the tea-table. It had been an exciting day for Dolly, and although the machinery of Cedar Hill ran on with its accustomed smoothness, she was tired, and glad to be alone. It had not been necessary to intimate her preferences. Amusement being the *raison d'être* for the convocation, when amusement was not to be thought of its dispersion became a matter of course. Mabel's abrupt departure was a subject of subdued comment, but was tacitly left in the background of silence. Dolly was never ready with off-hand or specious explanations, designed for smoothing over rough places or veiling what could not be concealed. She would have been glad to shield Mabel if she had known exactly what to shield her from, but she did not. Beyond some discreet expressions of surprise, no one increased her difficulties by awkward questions.

Before tea-time every one had gone except Helen, who, as Dolly explained to Margaret and

Paul, was very naturally much distressed by Mabel's conduct. Dolly was not devoid of curiosity or interest, and after the sleigh disappeared with Mrs. Frazer under the trees of the avenue she had gone to Helen's room for further light and information. But Helen was evidently as completely taken by surprise as she was herself. She was so much older than Mabel, and took so much more serious a view of life and of her responsibilities that Dolly quite pitied her. She told her very sweetly, in her effort to comfort, that she had no reason to blame herself, and that she was sure Mr. Temple would not hold her accountable for anything which had happened. She advised her not to worry, — as one always advises those who do, — and opposed with all the arguments at her command Helen's decision to make a visit to her home in Boston. If she did not feel like going to Gramercy Park, the next best thing to do was to stay quietly at Cedar Hill till she heard from Mr. Temple. Dolly was always hopeful, and did her best to persuade that all would end well. But Helen seemed benumbed by what Dolly thought an altogether exaggerated idea of her responsibility. She wanted to go to Boston, and she wanted to go at once. Poor Helen! it was her one refuge, — and how she dreaded it!

Paul was called upon to consult the time-tables. It was found impossible to reach Boston without

passing a night on the way. There was nothing to do but to wait till the following morning.

"I don't see," Dolly was saying as she poured the tea, "why Helen should feel so terribly cut up. She is not in the least to blame. How could she know anything? I have tried to induce her to wait at least till Laurinda comes back. There may be nothing to blame any way. But she has been so close to Mabel for so long a time that I suppose" — and Dolly left her sentence unfinished, as her wont was.

"Is n't she coming down to tea?" asked Paul.

"No. She is to have her dinner in her room. She has been helping Marie with Mabel's packing all the morning, and says she is tired."

Mrs. Frazer's telegram was brought in while Dolly was speaking.

"Mr. Temple" — she could not read it "John" as it was written — "and I arrive by three o'clock train" — Then she stopped short.

"Is that all?" said Paul. "She is not very explicit, is she?"

Dolly thought she was explicit enough. Her heart was beating furiously. She said she would go and see if Helen had had her tea. Instead of which she went directly to her own room, locked and bolted the door, sat down before the mirror over her dressing-table, and took one long look at herself, stretched out her hands with a little cry of

happiness, and then buried her face in her arms. It could not, could not, could not be! Yet it was the surest, truest, dearest thing in the world.

Mrs. Frazer and Jack arrived at six o'clock. Paul went down to the station, and Margaret and Dolly met them at the door. They sat down before the fire in the breakfast-room where tea was served again for the travelers, and talked the whole situation over, including the Argonaut mine. Jack seemed to take things very quietly. He had no blame for Mabel, and apologized for being there at all. He said he felt he ought to have remained with her, but she would not listen to it. She had insisted upon his coming back with Mrs. Frazer. But he would go down in the morning train. Where was Helen?

Dolly got up abruptly and said she would go and see.

She did not return, however, and finally Margaret went in search of her. Then Paul had to go and find Margaret, and Mrs. Frazer was left alone with Jack in the firelight.

"There was one matter of which I have said nothing as yet to any one," said Jack, walking slowly back and forth before the fire; "something which has disturbed me a good deal. Mabel told me she had quarreled with Helen." He stopped and looked inquiringly at Mrs. Frazer. "Do you know anything about it?"

"I seem to know nothing about anything," she replied a little tartly. "Quarreled with Helen! about what?"

"That is what I do not know. She would not say. She was strangely reticent. She said Helen would make her own explanations — and then again that Helen would not."

Mrs. Frazer listened in silence, her eyes fixed on the slumbering fire, while Jack repeated his conversation with Mabel.

"I cannot understand why she should not wish to go back to Gramercy Park. Do you think you could find out what the trouble is?"

"I think the less said about quarrels the better, John."

"Yes, that was my own thought at first. But it must be something serious. Have you no idea what it can be?"

Mrs. Frazer looked up from the fire into his face. What fools men were, — and women too!

"Mabel has no further need of Helen."

"No," replied Jack, "but it is a pity things should end in this way. It has always been a question with me what would become of Helen. Mabel has not needed her, strictly speaking, for some time. But she would never listen to her going. I hoped she might marry. She would make some one a good wife."

"Have n't we husbands enough on our hands for one day, John?"

"If Helen were really to leave us," he continued, "I should like to — to" —

"To what, John?"

— "to show her in some substantial way our appreciation of all she has done for Mabel. You know she has been with us since Mabel was ten years old. I supposed that would be Mabel's wish too."

"Well, was n't it?"

"She declared it was impossible."

Then silence fell upon them.

"What would you do?" Jack asked at length.

"I should go and dress for dinner," said Mrs. Frazer.

The conversation at the dinner-table was intermittent and constrained. Jack was thoughtful and quiet. Dolly was nervous and tranquil at intervals. Scarcely a word could be extracted from Mrs. Frazer. She looked very much like a bomb-shell on the eve of explosion.

The explosion came later in the evening when Paul had gone off with Margaret and the three were alone in the room which had been so gay with laughter the night before.

"John," said Mrs. Frazer, looking up from her finished solitaire and putting the cards away in their leather case, "to-day is Wednesday. You are going to New York to-morrow?"

"Certainly," said Jack.

"Could I trouble you to engage my passage on the Saturday Cunarder? I am going to Cairo."

"Laurinda!" exclaimed Dolly.

"This climate depresses me, — I need a change" —

"But Margaret is to be married in the spring!"

"Well, I am not going to marry her, am I?" said Mrs. Frazer.

Dolly was dumbfounded.

"It's a doleful business, traveling alone," Mrs. Frazer said with a sigh. "I wonder if I could persuade Helen to go with me. I think I will go and see."

She had gone before there was any opportunity to comment upon her suggestion, leaving an almost oppressive silence behind her. The inclusion of Helen in her plans, coming so unexpectedly after the abrupt intrusion of the Saturday Cunarder, afforded, Jack thought, abundant material for conversation.

Yet Dolly was silent. Nor did she rise, although it was getting late. She was sitting in the angle of the deep corner divan, altogether absorbed in her embroidery, and looking, so it seemed to Jack, younger than he had ever seen her look before, — almost girlish.

It was not a passive thing, this silence; but something positive, aggressive, gathering volume

like a rising flood. It did not occur to him that she was in any way responsible for it. On the contrary, she appeared to be its victim, and he felt he must get it under control at once. The unforeseen had brought him to Westford, and left him alone with the woman who had said No. How much more embarrassed than even he was she must be!

He did not see any embarrassment, however, when she lifted her face to his. It wore only an expression of deep and tranquil content. He had gone over to where she sat, to take his leave, and stood looking down at that something so profoundly peaceful yet appealing in her eyes.

"Are you going off in that horrid early train?" she asked, letting them fall.

"I must," he said, as he had said it once before. But she did not rise, as then, or say good-night.

"I suppose there is another directors' meeting."

"No, not this time," he said, sitting down beside her on the edge of the divan; "but there's Mabel, you know."

He was beginning to lose control of the silence, and of speech. He *must* go.

"Yes, there's Mabel" — and then she laid her hand on his arm and smiled — "Mabel — and I."

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